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MAUREEN

BY

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CHAPTER I

END OF THE RETREAT

THE Retreat being over, the excitable people waited outside the little house of their old parish priest, Father John, who was having a farewell glass with young Father Felix, of Bohanabree.

From the table Father John glanced through the window at the crowd.

"They're willin' enough," said he, "but terrible poor."

"After all," said Father Felix, good-humouredly, "the parish might be worse."

He smiled over the tumbler as he raised it to his lips, but Father John shook his grey head.

"I can't agree wid you," said he. "I've bin in Carrickmachree two-an'-twinty year come next October, an' it's worse it's gettin'. It was bad enough, but it's worse an' worse iv'ry year. Them that kin scrape a few pounds together go off to the States. God sind a turn may come, but I don't see any sign of it so far."

Remarking that it was time for him to be going anyhow, Father Felix started up to strap his portmanteau, which was on a chair. As he buckled on

walking-stick and umbrella he glanced over his shoulder at the old priest, who was staring morosely into his tilted tumbler.

"Perhaps," suggested Father Felix, "a miracle might happen."

Turning about, Father John saw the young priest's shoulders bent over the portmanteau.

"What d'you mane?" asked Father John.

"There now, that's done!" exclaimed Father Felix, lifting the strapped portmanteau with admiration, and letting it down on the chair again. "What do I mean?" he repeated, advancing to the window for a sight of his outside car. "Maybe I don't know what I mean. Maybe I do. Don't you know the old Irish sayin': 'A nod's as good as a wink to a blind horse'?"

He crossed to the fireplace to compare his gold repeater with the nickel clock which ticked under the ebony crucifix, while Father John watched him in puzzled silence. Father Felix held the watch against his ear.

"There's a difference of five minutes between us," said he; "But that's nothing. I think I hear Patsy bringin' the car along the street." Lifting his great-coat from a chair, he began to get into it. "What a sweet young woman Miss Maureen Malone's growin'!" he remarked. "It seems only the other day she was a slip of a girl with her hair flyin' down to her waist."

"A miracle?" repeated Father John, resting his brows on his fingers.

There was a knock at the door. Mrs. Doran, Father John's housekeeper, put in her head.

"If you plase, yir riverence," said she, "Mrs. Malone 'd like to spake a word wid you."

"Ax her to stip in," returned Father John, while Father Felix faced about with brightened eyes.

The door opened again to admit Mrs. Malone, leading the unwilling Maureen by the hand, while her young son, Jackeen, toiled after with a heavy parcel in his thin arms.

"Sure I couldn't let you go, Father Faylix," said she, "without thankin' you for the grand Retrate you conducted. All the world's delighted with you."

As Father Felix grasped the outstretched hand he turned to smile at Maureen, who had shrunk into a corner.

"It's too proud you want to make me, ma'am," said he. "But indeed it's sorry I am to have to run away so soon, for I'd like to call at the farm before I go. Sure it's more like her elder sister y' are, if I might say so without offence."

"Arra, get along with you!" said Mrs. Malone, blushing. "Maureen, come over here an' say a word to Father Faylix."

Advancing, Maureen stood looking down steadfastly at the floor.

"There's a powerful family resemblance, ma'am," said Father Felix.

"Maybe," suggested Mrs. Malone, "you might be able to run over next wake to Maureen's party. It's only a little party for childher, but, sure," she added, ignoring Maureen's mute reproach, "it's proud an' happy we'd be to see you."

"I'm thankful to you," said Father Felix, "and I'll

go if I can. By the same token, I hadn't the pleasure of meeting your good husband during the Retreat."

"I'm sorry to say," observed Mrs. Malone, "my husband's not too regular in his religious obsarvances. Father John knows that."

"Oh, mother, you mustn't say that!" exclaimed Maureen, indignantly.

But she instantly relapsed into silence before Father Felix's amused stare.

"Hould yir tongue, Maureen darlin'," said her mother. "You know it's truth I'm tellin'. She always takes her father's part," she added, apologetically.

Maureen retired to the bookcase, whither Father Felix followed her, and Father John looked up as Jackeen placed the parcel heavily on the table.

"What's that ye've got there, me boy?" he asked.

"A present for Father Faylix," whispered Mrs. Malone behind her hand. "Only a wee drop of the crathur. But it's rale good stuff."

"You naden't tell me that, ma'am," said Father John. "You niver brought anythin' to this house that wasn't the best. Jackeen, my child, run out with it an' put it in the well of the car. An' now," he continued, wiping his mouth with the tablecloth as he rose, "ye'd betther be goin' home ow' a' this, Father Faylix. Ye've a long road to thravel, an' I must git to bed airly meself as I'll be busy to-morra wid the new schoolmasther. So away wid you!"

They all went out together. There was a cheer when the group emerged. There was another cheer when Father Felix stepped on to his car and stood up to tuck the rug about his legs. A rope of laurel—

boughs with tinsel flowers stretched from the chimney of Mr. Delahunt's stores to a telegraph pole on the opposite side of the main street. It was Carrickmachree's triumphal arch in honour of the young parish priest of Bohanabree. As Father Felix passed under it he turned on the seat to wave a farewell to the cheering crowd in the distance, while his eyes at the same instant sought the figure of Maureen, who stood with downcast face beside her mother.

CHAPTER II

FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

THE chattering youngsters in the National school sat on their rough forms until the door opened admitting Father John with the new schoolmaster, Mr. Martin Harrington. All the children stood up.

"Silence!" exclaimed Father John.

There was a hushed pause.

"Childher," explained Father John, "this is yir new schoolmaster. Ye'll have to obey him an' do as he tells you, an' larn yir tasks. If there's any complaints med to me, I'll know how to thrate them. Remimber that! Now, Misther Harrington, I'd like to impress a few things on you. They're to larn their cathechism iv'ry day, an' riverence for the Church. You understand?"

With his hands folded behind under his black coat, Martin Harrington gazed round at the place where he proposed to spend the best years of his life. Puffing out his cheeks once or twice, Father John touched the young man on the arm with the point of his blackthorn.

"You fale a bit strange, of course," said he; "but now come wid me an' I'll show you round the place."

He pressed the young schoolmaster by the shoulder a little on in front, but turned in the doorway to shake his blackthorn at the ranks of polished faces.

"Not a word out of yiz!" he exclaimed. "Not as much as a whisper now. I'll be back in a few minutes, an' if I find any of yiz as much as lookin' crooked, God help yiz!"

When he had gone, the children, cowed by his parting menace, remained silent for some time. Presently, in the clear morning air, they heard, far away, a girl's voice singing. They looked at one another. As the voice came nearer there was an excited whisper, "Maureen!" When the song sounded close, every child was standing staring breathlessly towards the door. Laughingly thrusting in her head, Maureen looked about. Then she ran quickly in on tiptoe, glancing back to the door, her finger uplifted:

"I want you all to come to the party on Saturday," said she; "even Patsy Maher, the bouldest of the bould."

Little Patsy Maher, standing at the back on a form, his face scarlet, tumbled forward with excitement, clutching at the hair of a small girl in front. There was some screaming and a tussle, after which Patsy emerged, remounting his form.

"All to do whatever you like!" exclaimed Maureen. "Cake, barnbrack, swates, toys! Iv'ry one to get a toy! There'll be such fun!'

Her words were greeted with a general scream of rapture. Father John and the new schoolmaster appeared in the doorway.

"Back to yir sates, spalpeens!" roared Father John, striking his blackthorn on the nearest desk.

"Now, Miss Maureen, this is a fine way to upsit the childher. Back to yiz sates, you young divils, an' not a word out of yiz. This," he added to the amazed Harrington, as Maureen advanced, "is Miss Maureen Malone, that think's she manager of the school. But I'm manager. I'm appinted manager be the Govermint, an' it's the missmanager she is. Ye'll have to be on yir guard agin her, Misther Harrington."

"Father John," said Maureen reproachfully, "you don't understan' childher. Shoutin' at them like that as if they were a lot of savages! D'you intend to bate them, Misther Harrington?"

"I—I hope not," stammered the new schoolmaster, staring helplessly from her to Father John.

"He'll do whativer I tell him!" said Father John sternly. "An' I think ye'd betther go now an' not be upsettin' the minds of the childher. Misther Harrington an' meself have business to attind to."

"But, Father John, won't you give them a half-holiday to-day?" asked Maureen.

"Half-holiday? What for?" inquired Father John.

With a look of alarm he backed from her as she approached.

"Sure," explained Maureen, glancing at Mr. Harrington. "It's the first day, you know. An' don't I remember myself sittin' there on a day like this an' listenin' to the birds singin' out over the fields. Won't you, Father John, darlint?"

Shaking a hand aloft at her, he turned his head aside.

"Kape away from me now!" he exclaimed, "wid wiles an' witchcraft. Half-holiday, how are you! A

fine excuse for a half-holiday bekase birds are singin'! Now, Misther Harrington, if ye'r ready, we'll git to work."

Maureen came closer.

"Only this once!" she pleaded.

He moved round behind a high desk, over which he looked sternly at her.

"Away wid you now!" he said; "I won't give even a quarther holiday, an' let that be the end to it!"

Shrugging her shoulders she looked miserable a moment. Then turned brightly to the children.

"Remember!" she exclaimed.

A moment after they heard her singing without. Father John marched to the front rank. As he inspected the thronged forms the children bent over their books. When he returned, Martin Harrington was standing close to one of the diamond-paned windows, listening to the last notes of Maureen's voice as it died away. Father John touched him with the end of the blackthorn on the shoulder.

"It's an old Irish song," said the new schoolmaster, turning. "'Across the sunlit hills, mavrone!'"

Amazed at the strange look in the young man's eyes Father John fell back a pace.

"What's wrong?" he asked gruffly.

"Not a note wrong, sir!" exclaimed Martin Harrington, enthusiastically.

There was a moment's silence. Helping himself to a pinch of snuff, Father John gazed over the desk at the young man.

"Look here, me young frind," said he. "Miss Maureen's the daughter of the richest farmer in the

townland. Let that be enough for you now. 'Git to yir work, and remimber ye'v yir way to make in the world. Come up to me this evenin' for further instructhions."

He went away, and Martin Harrington, mounting the seat behind the tall desk, sat looking dazedly at the rows of upturned shining faces and white pinafores.

CHAPTER III

MAUREEN'S BABIES

RESTING his large frame against the front gate, Mr. Malone meditatively munched a straw. Beside him stood the little shopkeeper, Mr. Delahunt, nervously fingering his short beard. Through the illumined windows of the farmhouse behind came the boisterous voices of children at play.

"They seem to be injyin' themselves," observed Mr. Delahunt.

"Maureen's there," remarked Mr. Malone. "An' that's all the childher want. If there wasn't any pianna or tay or barneybrack, it'd be all the same if Maureen was with them. She used to be tirrible on dolls, an' now she's aiqually powerful on childher."

Gazing yacantly up the starlit road before them Mr. Delahunt remained silent. Through the corners of his grey eyes the big farmer studied the little man.

"An' how's business with you, Misther Delahunt?" he asked brightly.

Mr. Delahunt sighed.

"Only middlin', I thank you kindly. We did fairly

well durin' the Rethrate, what with the dhrink an' odds an' ends that the women kem for."

"An' how does the missis go on?" asked Mr. Malone.

"The missis? She's doin' well, I thank you. I was a bit narvous about her takin' thim religious fits; afeared she'd neglict the shop. But, praises be to God! she kept her head right this time. I'm terrible afeared of thim Rethrates. Of course, they're all right an' proper in their way, but Mrs. Delahunt—well, she has her business to mind, and women sometimes lose their heads intirely over these religious obsarvances."

"Ay, ay," assented Mr. Malone, with a soft laugh; "they're the divils intirely for religion. But, of course, as you say, Misther Delahunt, it's all right in its way. Maybe," he added, reflectively, "it kapes the poor things from worse."

A burst of laughter from the house made Mr. Delahunt turn in that direction. Observing the action, Mr. Malone unfolded his arms and tossed the straw away.

"This is poor friendship," he said, "to bring you out in the could when you might be inside takin' a dhrop. Come in an' have a look at Maureen's party."

As they were passing down towards the door they heard footsteps. Mr. Malone was the first to turn, shading his eyes with his hand.

"By the hole in my coat!" he exclaimed, "talkin' about the clargy, here comes Father John an' another of them. Let's see. Ay, troth, it's the young praste that conducted the Rethrate. A fine, sthrappin' fella he is too. You go in, Misther Delahunt, an' I'll step out to mate the hierarchy."

Approaching to the window, Mr. Delahunt, looking over the blind, saw the children romping in the big room; Mrs. Delahunt, one of twelve mothers, seated six each side. The front door being ajar, he slipped through, entering the opposite room where the supper-table was laid. Here he seated himself modestly in a chair near the fireside. Mr. Malone presently arrived with the two clergymen, taking off his soft hat as he entered.

"Sit down, jintlemen," said he in his heartiest tones, "sit down, an' welcome as the flowers of May! If I may make so bould, Father John, it's well you're lookin', praises be to God!"

Breathing heavily as he seated himself, Father John glanced up at the smiling face of the farmer, but said nothing. Father Felix had paused on his way to a chair to turn his head in the direction of the opposite room.

"I dropped in on Father John," he explained to Mr. Malone, "an' nothing'd do him but I must come across to see you."

"An' welcome, yir riverence, agin an' agin!" exclaimed Mr. Malone. "Hould on now an' I'll give you something to kape out the cowld. Hould on now till I git some dacent tumblers. I'll call my good woman. Honor! Are you there, me darlint?"

Stepping to the door, his powerful voice penetrated the uproar of the children, bringing Mrs. Malone hurrying out, her handsome face flushed with excitement. When she saw the clergymen she instantly lowered her apron which had been pinned up.

"This is a pleasure," said she; "Father Faylix, too!

You're right welcome, sir! Dinnis, won't you get the gintlemen—— "

"Sure, an' isn't that what I called you for, Honor," interrupted Mr. Malone, with a good-humoured smile. "We want a few dacent, clane tumblers, for I mane to uncork the bist jar of whiskey in Ireland. Father John," he added, turning his head as he approached the cabinet, "divil a lie I'm tellin' you. It's the best whiskey from here to Cork, an' if you don't agree with me when you taste it, sorra save the sup I'll ever take agin. Now, Honor, the tumblers, my girl!"

Mrs. Malone, who had been staring at her husband, her mouth opened, now coloured to the roots of her hair and hurried gasping down the hall. Smiling with anticipation, Mr. Malone laboriously selected a key from a big bunch which he took from his trousers pocket. He bent to open the cabinet. Presently his face changed from surprise to amazement. He searched every shelf. At last he straightened himself.

"By the powers of Moll Kelly," he shouted, "it's gone! The jar of the best whiskey in Ireland—it's gone! An' no wan had the kay but meself. Honor! Are you there? I want you. Woman, agra, what kapes you?"

In his excitement, forgetting his guests, he strode out into the hall roaring in the direction of the kitchen until the scared children became hushed. But there was no sign of Mrs. Malone.

"Jintlemen," said he, returning, "I've to ax yir pardon. It's sorry I am to kape you waitin'."

"For my part," observed Father Felix, rising, "I'd as lief go and join the childher, Mister Malone, if you've no objection."

"Sure an' welcome!" said Mr. Malone, absently, gazing at the open door of the empty cabinet. "The bist jar of whiskey in Ireland," he added under his breath.

There was the sound of whistling, followed by the appearance of Desmond Malone, who had come in through the back door from the stable yard. He took off his cap.

"Good evenin', Father John!" he exclaimed; "Great doin's here to-night. Maureen playin' fairy godmother to the chicks. Well, father?"

As his son turned brightly towards him, Mr. Malone bent forward to fill a glass for Father John from a decanter of ordinary whiskey. At the same moment Mrs. Malone came in with a tray of sweet cakes and the tumblers, which she placed on the table. Surprised at his father's coldness, Desmond Malone raised his eyebrows as he exchanged glances with his mother.

"Go an' help to amuse the childher, Dismond," said she; "Maureen's nearly kilt dancin' an' prancin'. She'll be sick for a wake after all this hullabaloo."

"Sartinly, mother," said Desmond quietly, with another look at his father's averted face.

As he was about to depart, Mr. Malone turned round.

"Dismond!" said he.

Facing about in the doorway, cap in hand, Desmond came back a step, gazing frankly at his father's troubled face.

"Dismond," said Mr. Malone slowly, "you remimber the jar of whiskey I placed in the cabinet beyant last Sathurday?"

Starting, Desmond looked from the open door of the cabinet to his father, then at his mother, who began feverishly to settle the things on the table. Father John impassively stirred the sugar in his punch.

"Remimber it?" said Desmond. "Why, sir, of coorse I do. What about it?"

Striking his huge hand on the table, Mr. Malone made the glasses rattle; Mrs. Malone jumped, while Father John hastily removed the tumbler to his knees.

"It's gone, Dismond," said his father, looking fixedly at him.

"Gone!" repeated Desmond, stupefied.

"Ay," said his father, with an ironical smile. "Taken wings an' flew up the chimbley, Dismond. But I don't want to make a big businiss out of a jar of whiskey. Go an' amuse the babbies, Dismond."

For a moment Desmond stood with horrified stare at his father, then drawing himself proudly up left the house without a word.

His mother stole away, furtively putting the corner of her apron to her eyes. Finishing his glass, Father John placed it on the table; then, drawing a large red handkerchief from the tail of his coat, began to wipe his mouth. Mr. Malone remained with clenched hand on his knee, his lips tightly pressed as he stared at the floor; but when Father John coughed, he looked up.

"Arra, a thousind pardons, Father John!" he exclaimed, rising hastily. "Another tumbler——"

Father John spread a fat hand over the glass which the farmer resolutely seized.

"Not another dhrop, Misther Malone," he protested.

"Come, now, Father John," said Mr. Malone, coaxingly. "Ye're not goin' to be contint with a couple of mouthfuls. You must jine Misther Delahunt an' meself for the sake of company."

Father John allowed his hand to slide from the tumbler, and when the drinks were renewed, Mr. Malone clinked glasses.

"Yir health, Father John, an' long life!"

"Same to you, Misther Malone!"

Mr. Malone bent confidentially forward.

"It's not," he explained, "that I mind a jar of whiskey. I'm not a poor man. But, that Dismond—he's bin startin' some sort of a club—an Improvemint Sissiety he calls it—up at Kelly's cabin beyant, an' I'm afeard it's card playin' an' drinkin'——"

"I've hard somethin' about it," interrupted Father John. "But Sergeant Mulcahy doesn't think there's any harm in it."

"A dacent, straight man!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, with an air of relief.

"He's all that," assented Father John. "If anythin' goes wrong he'll tell me, an' that'll be the end of it. Is yir wife here to-night?" he asked, turning abruptly to Mr. Delahunt, who in his corner was striving to make himself as small as possible.

"Beg pardin', yir riverence; yis, sir. Oh, yis, Mrs. Delahunt is here, I thank you, an' doin' finely."

These confused words were uttered in an apologetic tone, as if Mr. Delahunt was painfully conscious of taking a great liberty in speaking at all.

"Well," said Father John kindly, "there's a good woman here at that rate. There's not a betther wan goin' than Mrs. Delahunt. For it's a thrue daughter

of the Church she is, an' no wan knows that betther nor me."

Overcome by these gracious words, Mr. Delahunt rubbed his hands together with modest exultation.

"Oh, yir riverence!" said he, "sure that's very kind of you to say that, an' it's herself'll jump out of her skin whin I make bould to tell her what ye've said, yir riverence."

Meanwhile Father Felix, having entered the opposite room, found Maureen playing Blindman's Buff. She was blindfolded, her arms outstretched; the children scampering round her, some advancing on tiptoe to her face; others pulling at her dress suddenly from behind. The twelve mothers were smiling from their seats around the walls, and Martin Harrington was watching from the piano. When Father Felix walked straight towards her, she seized him. At the same moment she raised the handkerchief from her eyes. Amidst general laughter she shrank back and hid herself in a far corner. Sitting down, Father Felix took a little girl on one knee, a boy on the other, and asked them questions in the Catechism, their childish answers causing much amusement. Then he sang a funny song for the children, and told them a fairy tale. When Mrs. Malone entered he looked up.

"Maybe," said he, "Miss Maureen'll sing us a song now?"

Mrs. Malone forced the unwilling Maureen from her hiding-place to the piano, and after a whispered consultation with Mr. Harrington she sang "Across the Sunlit Hills."

All—save the children, who would have preferred more play—listened in delight, particularly Father

Felix, who leaned back in the chair, his knees crossed, his fingers linked on his bosom, his eyes turned up.

"The voice of an angel!" he exclaimed when the song finished.

CHAPTER IV

SEAGULLS

ON the road outside the farm Sergeant Mulcahy slowly paced up and down, sometimes gazing at the lighted windows, sometimes at a light glimmering in Kelly's cabin amongst the trees on the opposite hill. When the party broke up he hastened to the front door, standing aside as the children trooped out from the broad hall until he saw his little daughter, Eileen, heavy-eyed but happy, hugging a big doll. Lifting the child, and calling out his thanks to Maureen, who stood back in the hall, he departed homeward, Eileen's tired face resting on his shoulder. When he had transferred her to his wife, he started out again, making rapidly across the river bridge, striking the path to the hill. Near a stile close by he heard the crackle of a twig. A man was seated with crossed legs on the ditch.

"Who's there?" the sergeant suddenly demanded, his left hand softly feeling for his bayonet.

The man rose with a laugh.

"Good-night, Sergeant!"

"Who is that?" The sergeant advanced a step. "Larry Magee?"

Taking off his cap, Larry Magee scratched his head, laughing stupidly.

"Ay, troth, Sergeant, unless I've forgotten who I am, dhroppin' aslape here."

"A quare place to drop aslape!" observed the sergeant. "What brings you out here to slape? You usually slape in the farm."

"Look at that now!" said Larry, admiringly. "Of course I do. But I was tired afther me day's work, an' thought I'd like to take a sthroll."

The grey-headed sergeant gazed hard into Larry's face, which had assumed an expression of profound stupidity.

"When a man's tired," observed Sergeant Mulcahy, "he usually takes a rest—not a sthroll."

"Arra, Sergeant, ye'r tirrible sharp!" said Larry, with rising admiration. "Sure, I wanted to freshen meself up a bit."

Stepping aside, the sergeant pointed up to the light amongst the trees.

"Come here," said he.

"Where?" asked Larry. "Sure I kin scarcely see where y'are, Sergeant, avic."

Grasping him by the shoulder the sergeant pointed again. "Stan' here," said he, "an' look up. D'you see that light?"

"A light?" Larry looked steadily in the opposite direction. "Sorra light I see at all, Sergeant. Whereabouts?"

"Wait a minute," said the sergeant. "I'll fix it for you. D'you see the wood beyant?"

"The wood, Sergeant?"

"Ay, the wood," replied the sergeant, sternly. "Don't fall aslape yet, Larry. Wait now. You see Kelly's cabin in the wood?"

"Sure, the divil a thing I kin see at all, the night's so dark," answered Larry. "But I kin feel. An' ye'r squazin' me shouldher mighty hard, Sergeant."

"Well, I'll squaze it till you open yir eyes," returned the sergeant. "Look up. D'you see a light in the cabin?"

"The cabin?"

With his face close to the sergeant's, Larry stared apparently with all his might. Then, taking off his cap, he scratched his head, tightened the knot of the red muffler about his throat, and gave vent to a deep sigh.

"Sure, Sergeant, only I know you," said he, "I'd say ye'd bin dhrinkin'. No offince! The divil a light I see at all, at all."

"I think it'ud be betther for you if you did!" observed the sergeant, with an emphasis which made Larry start. "Come now, have another try."

Larry took a long look.

"Bedad, ye'r right!" he exclaimed. "But sure, it's only a will-of-the-wisp. It's nothin'. I often see them. An' ould bog light. That's all."

"Too steady for that, Larry," said the sergeant.

"Anyhow, I'm goin' to have a light meself," said Larry, with sudden cheerfulness. "A pull at the dhudeen'll do me no harm."

Stepping nimbly behind the sergeant, he struck a match, which he instantly tossed into the air; struck another with a like result. Sergeant Mulcahy turned quickly. He saw Larry striking a third match, which, having laboriously lit his pipe, he threw away with the same high motion of the hand. At the same moment, a few yards away, there was heard a cry like that of a sea-gull; a similar cry was repeated higher up and yet

another. On the third repetition the light in the cabin went out. Pulling hard at the short clay pipe, covering the bowl with his hand, Larry watched the sergeant out of the corners of his sharp eyes.

"A quare lot of saygulls about to-night," observed the sergeant, with quiet irony; adding in a friendly manner, "I wonder who's making use of that ould shanty up there, Larry?"

He had turned to pace slowly in the direction of the town, Larry falling into step beside him.

"Well, Sergeant," said Larry, stopping for another stiff pull at the pipe, which he struck into his palm to loosen the tobacco, "now that you remind me, I belave some lads about the place have bin talkin' of makin' an Improvement Sissiety, or some quare thing like that. I only heard the talk. Maybe it's thim."

"An Improvement Sissiety, Larry?" observed the sergeant thoughtfully, sticking his thumbs into his leathern belt. "There's no harm in that. I'll send some of the young constables to join them."

Larry laughed, rather uncomfortably.

"The constables, sir?" said he.

"Why not? They want improvement," said the sergeant. "I suppose, now, it's algebra an' jography they'll be studyin'? D'you know any of them? Is Misther Dismond among them now? I saw him this evenin' goin' up towards the hill."

"Misther Dismond, is it?" returned Larry, pulling viciously at the short clay. "Sure, I left him safe an' sound in bed afore I kem out."

As he spoke footsteps were heard coming rapidly behind them. Both men halted, the sergeant stepping quickly back into the black shade of a hawthorn.

"Hallo, there!" exclaimed a fresh voice; "are you there, Larry?"

"Why, if it isn't Misther Dismond himself!" exclaimed Larry, with amazement. "Well, be all the powers! An' I was just tellin' the sergeant here—the sergeant here—I was just tellin' the sergeant here you wor safe an' sound in bed. An' so you wor, sir, whin I kem out. But I suppose, like meself an' the sergeant here—I say, like meself an' the sergeant here, you thought ye'd like a bit of a sthroll."

At the first mention of the sergeant Desmond, who had been approaching with free step, shrank back, then smartly came forward.

"Where is the sergeant?" he asked. "I don't see him."

Giving Desmond's near arm a strong pinch Larry bent close.

"Whisht! He's listenin'," he whispered.

But when he turned there was no sergeant to be seen. Larry stood staring nervously about, striving to pierce the darkest nooks in the ditch.

"Come on," said Desmond. "Ye'v bin dhramin'. There's no sergeant here now, at any rate.'

"Are you there, Sergeant?" shouted Larry, with quavering voice.

There was no response.

"Come on!" exclaimed Desmond some paces ahead.

"Well, Sergeant!" said Larry, "good-night anyhow, no matther where y'are, an' God bl—ess you!"

He followed his master, who was already nearing the farm. But at the cross-roads Desmond halted until Larry came up.

'Here we part," said he.

'Sure, aren't you comin' home, sir?" exclaimed Larry.

"Not while father thinks me a thafe," said Desmond, with bitter pride. "His roof 'll niver shelther me with thim thoughts in his mind."

"Is it worryin' about that y'are still, sir?" said Larry, with a groan. "Sure the masther won't think twice of it agin. It's not his nathur. He's too big a heart, God bless him! An' Miss Maureen! Sure, sir, she'll be terribly put about if she finds you avoidin' the house."

"I can't help that," returned Desmond, sternly. "It's none of my doin'. No other man but father would have dared to charge me with stealin'. A dirty jar of whiskey! I, a jinral in the Irish Republican army," he exclaimed with increased bitterness, "to stoop so low as that!"

"For Heaven's sake, sir!" said Larry in a hurried whisper, stepping closer. "What are you sayin'? Don't you know, the sergeant——"

"Good-night, Misther Dismond!" cried the voice of Sergeant Mulcahy, as he emerged from the darkness and quietly proceeded towards the town.

"He's heard you!" gasped Larry, grasping his young master with trembling hand.

"An' what if he has!" said Desmond, shaking him contemptuously off. "If ye'r afeared, you can resign. Good-night!"

He too strode away, and Larry stood awhile to stare blankly after him, then faced in the direction of the farmhouse, which now rose dark and silent.

CHAPTER V

THE SCHOOLMASTER'S MASTER

THE evening after the party Martin Harrington entered through the small wooden gate of Father John's front garden. When he had nervously rapped the brass knocker, the front door was opened by Mrs. Doran.

"Yis, his riverence is in," she said in reply to his hesitating question. "But I'm thinkin' he's aslape. Come in widout noise an' wipe yir fate on the mat."

Stepping into the narrow hall, the schoolmaster remained standing on the worn mat until Mrs. Doran, having cautiously thrust her head into the room, drew it out again.

"He's aslape, shure enough," said she in a whisper; "But, as he expicts you, go in an' sit down in yir sate widout a noise till he wakes up."

Hat in hand Martin stepped into the room. The remains of the dinner had not yet been removed. In an armchair beside the fireplace reclined Father John, his fingers laced on his stomach, his head thrown back, a large red cotton handkerchief spread on his knees. With some curiosity the schoolmaster looked towards the small bookcase in the corner; then, in his

anxiety to approach without noise, tripped over a hole in the carpet and stumbled against the table.

"Glory be to God!" exclaimed Father John starting wide awake. "What's that, at all, at all?"

Martin Harrington stood rubbing his elbows.

"I—I'm very sorry," he stammered.

Sitting up with his fists on his knees, Father John stared hard at him, then, after a pause, began feeling for his snuff-box in the tail pocket of his coat.

"I thought the house was comin' down," said he. "That's a quare awkward way to be goin' about. Sit down, sit down, young man, till I've time to talk to you."

Meekly sitting down on the nearest chair, Martin bent his eyes on the floor. Father John helped himself noisily to a prolonged pinch of snuff.

"I didn't expict you so soon," said he.

"I came at the hour appointed," said Martin, "but, if it's not convenient, I'll call at any time."

Father John paused for an astonished stare with the red handkerchief raised halfway to his face.

"Of coorse ye'll call," said he. "Ye'll call whinever I sind for you. But you kin stay now."

After a fit of sneezing he blew his nose and lay back with a pleasing sense of exhaustion, looking up at the ceiling, his feet crossed. Turning in his seat Martin Harrington gazed at the bookcase.

Presently, Father John, sitting up, shook himself, wiping some snuff from the back of his left hand.

"Ye'll find me boots there," said he, "in the corner beside the bookcase. I'll get ready now wid the help of God."

Fetching the boots, the schoolmaster placed them

down beside the footstool. Father John raised his right foot.

"Pull off me slippers," said he.

Pulling off the slippers Martin let them drop on the floor. With much hard breathing Father John got into his heavy walking-boots, then, after another rest, rose, shaking out his trousers.

"Ye'll find me coat an' hat an' blackthorn in the hall," said he.

When these articles were fetched, Father John held out his arms and turned his back, while Martin helped him on with the coat. They went out, Father John stepping sturdily ahead, Martin following when he had closed the front door. About half-way up the hill, when they could already dimly see the chapel in the starlight, Father John took hold of his companion by the arm.

"Young man," said he, impressively, "ye'r a stranger here an' ye'v to make yir way wid the people. Be guided be me! Remimber now! If you want to git on, do as I bid you an' ye'll find it's the best in the long run. If you have any sinse in yir head ye'll be careful to mind my advice. Place yirself in my hands an' ye'll find iv'rything'll come right. Go agin me an' ye'll regret it to the last hour of yir life. Here's the chapel now. Come wid me."

They had arrived before the sacristy, where, Father John having tapped with the handle of his blackthorn, the door was suddenly opened. As he entered, Martin looked round but could see no one. Passing on through this dim apartment Father John called, "This way!" and when Martin stumbled after, he heard the door of the sacristy closing. Some one was

panting close behind him. In the church the aisle was dark; the starlight glimmered through the stained-glass window on the bright ornaments around the altar on his right. For a moment or two he heard the heavy foot of Father John on the tiled floor in front; then silence followed by whispering. Presently a light was struck, and he saw a small, thin hand carrying the match towards a tall candle. He was roused by a pressure on the arm. Father John was beside him.

"Sit down here, young man," said Father John in a whisper. "Mind where ye'r going. Here's a binch."

Martin having groped his way to the seat, Father John sat down beside him.

"Be guided by me, me young friend," said Father John. "Kape yir eye on the statya."

A few paces distant the tall candle shed its light on the wooden statue of the Virgin and Child, and Martin stared until his eyes grew sore. Father John edged closer.

"I've seen quare things of late," said he, "from this very sate. I want to know if you kin see them as well. That's why ye'r here. Kape yir eye on the blessed statya, an' may God direct you!"

There was a long silence. Drawing in his breath, Father John clutched the schoolmaster's arm.

"Don't you see it?" he eagerly asked.

"I see nothing but the light on the face of the statue," replied Martin, in a low voice.

"Look agin!" said Father John, sternly.

Again there was silence, save for the laboured breathing of Father John. As the candle flickered Martin watched the play of light and shadow on the rudely-carved figures.

"Well?" said Father John at length. "D'you notice anythin' quare, me son?"

"Nothing," answered Martin. "Nothing whatever."

"Come out!" said Father John, rising. "Come out of this!"

As he followed the priest back to the sacristy Martin was startled by a figure which glided suddenly from the doorway.

"Is that you, Jackeen?" exclaimed Father John.

"Yis, father," replied the figure.

"Go an' put out the candle, me boy," said Father John, "an' bring me the keys. Young man," he added, turning sternly to Martin, "come with me."

They left the place, Martin Harrington following down the dark hill in silence. Arriving at his own door, Father John abruptly turned.

"Go home now," said he, "an' if I hare any complaints about you it'll be worse for you. I'm thinkin' it's too proud y'are to tache the poor childher of Carrickmachree. But I'll look afther you, proud as y'are. Away wid you now!"

When Father John was raising the latch of the door Jackeen arrived panting.

"Here's the kay of the sacristy, father."

"What's that?" asked Father John, facing about. "Oh, it's you, Jackeen. Ye'r a good boy. God bless you!"

"Is the schoolmasther gone?" asked Jackeen, staring around in astonishment.

"Ay, troth is he," growled Father John. "Let him go. A proud, stiff-necked young man. But he'd betther mind himself. I'll tache him somethin', school-

masther an' all as he is. He could see nothin'. He hasn't grace enough in him. An' it's thinkin' I am, his manner was naythor respictful to me or the howly place he was in. I'll have to look sharp afther him."

"He saw nothin', father!" exclaimed Jackeen, in a disappointed tone.

"Sorra a thing, me child."

Shaking his head, Father John pushed open the door, but Jackeen following him a step into the hall, plucked at his coat-tail.

"Father!" he whispered.

Father John bent down an ear. Jackeen stood on tiptoe.

"I'm sure mother could see, father," whispered the lad.

For a moment or two Father John gazed in a stupefied way; but suddenly brightened, and seized the boy by both shoulders.

"Why, to be sure, to be sure!" he exclaimed. "Jackeen, me cliver lad, me good lad, but it's the fine praste ye'll make, thanks be to God. It's meself will watch you through Maynooth if I'm spared. Yir mother'd see, of course she would, agra. God bless you, Jackeen; tell yir mother I want to see her to-morra, in the evenin'. She knows the time to come. Good-night, me child, an' God bless you agin!"

He laid his hand on the boy's bent head and they parted.

CHAPTER VI

MR. MALONE JUBILANT

HAVING made a journey round his great farm, Mr. Malone was returning, elated with the prospect of a magnificent harvest, when he discovered Mr. Delahunt wandering close to the house. Taking the little shopkeeper by the arm, he led him forthwith into the sitting-room, forcing him into his own pet chair.

"Want to see me on business, do you?" said he. "Well, sit there now, Misther Delahunt an' make yirself at home. We'll come to business by an' by. That's where ye'll stay now for the next two hours or more. 'Make yirself at home, an' a thousind welcomes!"

Wiping his hot brow against the back of his hand, Mr. Malone smiled with a white show of regular teeth at his guest. The latter made an apologetic attempt to rise, but Mr. Malone placed a finger on his chest, with a pressure which sent the little shopkeeper back gasping.

"But I must go!" he protested; "I only kem to see you on a bit of business. The missus'll think I'm lost."

"The divil a go ye'll go!" returned Mr. Malone, heartily. "An' the missis knows ye'r ould enough now to have sinse, an' not lose yirself like wan of Maureen's babbies. Just you kape quiet now, an' take out yir dhudheen an' have a smoke. Did you bring it wid you?"

Feeling anxiously in his pockets, Mr. Delahunt's thin face brightened as he drew forth a small, blackened briar.

"That's right!" said Mr. Malone, admiringly. "An' there's a jar of tibacca here on the chimbley piece. I'll place it nigh you here. Don't disthurb yirself to rise. I'll just go an' call Mrs. Malone to give us a bit of supper."

"No, railly!" observed Mr. Delahunt, rising to protest again. "I'm not goin' to give you all this thrubble."

On his way to the door Mr. Malone turned to frown with exaggerated ferocity.

"Will you sit down there now?" said he, "or must I git a rope an' tie you to the chair? I don't want to use any coarcion. Don't drive me to it." Going to the door, he roared out, "Honor! Are you there, me darlint?"

Returning, he clapped his hands together, his face beaming.

"The best harvist," he exclaimed, "for twinty year! By the powers, it took the sight out of me eyes. I'll trouble you to drink a stiff glass with me to-night, Misther Delahunt. The best harvist. What's kapin the woman? Are you there, Honor? Make haste, me darlint, an' don't kape two respictable dacent min starvin' for a bit to ate."

"There'll be a fine harvist, then?" remarked Mr. Delahunt, looking up as he slowly filled the pipe from the jar between his knees.

"Ay, thank God!" said Mr. Malone, with great heartiness. "If the weather kapes fine now for a spell, I'll have half the min, women, an' childher in the county hard at work. Glory be to God, for all His marcies! Arra, Honor, is that yirself? Let me inthroduce you to an ould friend of mine—Misther Delahunt, who's starvin' for a bite of could chicken. Give him yir purty hand an' wan of yir partikler, impidint kisses, my swateheart!"

Mrs. Malone had entered, hastily wiping her hands in her apron, her face expressing some concern at being hurried from her labours in the kitchen.

"Sure, Mr. Delahunt," said she, "there's no need of an inthroduction. Ye'r heartily welcome!"

Hurriedly putting down the tobacco jar on the floor, Mr. Delahunt actually blushed as the handsome woman beamed on him. But he was conscious that she was not overjoyed at his presence.

"Yir good husband," he explained, "forced me in, an' I'm afeard I'm in the way, ma'am. If it's all the same to you, ma'am, seeing that yer busy, I'll take my departure."

Mr. Malone, who had followed his wife round the table, placed a hand on her shoulder, stopping in front of Mr. Delahunt.

"Look here," said he, "if I hear a word from you about goin' agin, by all the goats in Gorey, I'll sind you home a corpse. Honor! Is there air an ould chicken you could give us, an' a bit of bacon an' somethin' nice an' swate like yirself, mavourneen?"

"Indade, now," said Mrs. Malone, beginning to rub her hands again in her apron, "but it's mortial sorry I am. I've bin puttin' up the only two cowld chickens we have for Father John. But there's some cowld mate an' I'll have some nice eggs an' rashers——"

"Hear that now!" exclaimed her husband, shaking his head. "Just listen to that! The best in the house goes to Father John! There's a fine girl for you—attentive to her clargy. Och, sure, but she's makin' her sowl airly, the darlint! Isn't it enough for you, mavrone, to be an angel here without worryin' whether ye'll have a pair of wings or not in the nixt world? But what's the use of talkin' to the women, Misther Delahunt! Isn't Mrs. Delahunt another of the saints? Not that I'd say a word agin' her behind her back, God bless her!

"All right, Honor." He turned to his wife, who was blushing uneasily and looking down. "Git ready the best in the house for ould Father John an' give Misther Delahunt here an' meself any ould bones that have a pick on them. Hurrish now, me girl, or maybe I won't give you the kiss I'm kapin' for you to-night afther ye'v said yir Hail Marys."

"Indade, d'you hear him, Misther Delahunt?" protested Mrs. Malone as she turned to go. "Isn't it a shame for a man like him to be makin' fun of religion?"

"The divil a fun I'm makin' of it, achushla," said Mr. Malone, putting his arm round her waist and winking over her shoulder at Mr. Delahunt. "Sure, it's the best thing in the world for kapin' the women in order. Here's yirself now. Only for it ye'd be flirtin' wid all the young sparks in the townland.

Away wid you now and bring us an ould rasher an' a few stale eggs!"

When she was gone and Mr. Malone was busying himself to obtain liquid refreshment, Mr. Delahunt slowly drew an official document from his breast-pocket in an hesitating manner.

"The businiss I kim on," he began.

"Oh, ay, let's have it over!" exclaimed Mr. Malone.

"I wint in to Bohanabree this morn," explained Mr. Delahunt, "to the bank, an' the manager says he'll take ten pounds off the bill an' take your name on the back for the renewal. But it's slow I am to ax you afther the many times ye've done it!"

"Give's a hould of the bill!" said Mr. Malone. "Here, where's the pin an' ink?"

He went over to the side-table and in a few moments returned with his name scrawled on the back of the bill, which he placed in the eager hands of the shopkeeper.

"Sure, it's the thrue friend y'are!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt.

"Arra, go on wid you," said Mr. Malone. "I'd be the quare curmudgeon if I wouldn't oblige a dacent neighbour like yirself. It's glad I am to see you there enjoyin' the dhudheen. Just put yir lips to that drop of whiskey an' maybe it'll make the tibacca swater. I never could manage a pipe meself, though I tried hard when I was a boy; but, sure, it sames to be great company."

Tumbler in hand he sat down, gazing with hungry anxiety towards the door until Mrs. Malone, followed close by Jackeen, appeared with a tray of dishes. Mr.

Malone watched Jackeen as he furtively kept near his mother's skirts.

"Look there, Mr. Delahunt," said the farmer, "there's a skinamalink! There's a thraneen for you! Not a bit of dacent muscle in the whole of his body. Come here, Jackeen, me boy, till I have a talk wid you."

Instead of obeying, Jackeen took refuge behind his mother, who was now helping a maid to arrange the table.

"Come here, sir, this instant!" roared Mr. Malone.

Clinging to his mother's dress, Jackeen whispered to her in a frightened tone.

"You do well," said Mrs. Malone to her husband, "to frighten a poor child that the life's only stuck in. Can't you let him alone an' not for ever be jibin' an' jeerin' at him. Run away, Jackeen, my child."

"Sure I wasn't hurtin' him," protested Mr. Malone, rising to stretch himself. "He's a good, pious boy an' he'll be a credit to the clargy when he puts on flesh. He's not made for farm work, you know, Misther Delahunt, like his brother Dismond. The Riverend Father Jackeen! Well, God be praised, here's somethin' to ate. Sit down, Misther Delahunt. Won't you give us yir company, Honor?"

"Misther Delahunt must excuse me," observed Mrs. Malone, pulling forward a chair for him. "But Father John has sent for me on some partiklar business. I'm sure I don't know what it is. But, maybe, I'll be back before you go. How's yir good wife?"

Mr. Delahunt laid aside his pipe on the mantelpiece before seating himself at the table.

"Indade, then, she's purty well, I thank you, ma'am,"

he replied. "I nadent ax how y'are yirself, ma'am, for, sure, ye'r always lookin' yir best."

"By the hole in my coat, Honor!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, smiling as he sharpened the carving-knife, "there's a compliment for you. An' it's thrue enough. Her hair's as black as a sloe still. But you should have seen her whin she was about Maureen's age, whin I was coortin' her. Och, the charms of her, then! Many's the time I used to lie awake all night thinkin' of her!"

"I'm sure you did!" said Mrs. Malone, taking a last anxious look round the table.

"Ay, troth, I did," said Mr. Malone looking up from his carving. "Many's an' many's the time. But yer grown a bit stouter since then, Honor. Come th' give's a kiss!"

"Arra, get along with you!" said Mrs. Malone. "Did you iver know such a man, Misther Delahunt? Well," she wiped her palms in her apron, "I must say goodbye to you, but I won't be long."

"No, don't be long, achushla!" Mr. Malone called after her. "Sure, it's sittin' in the dark we are, without the light of yir eyes. Now, Misther Delahunt, there's a slice of the jint. Help yirself. Off to Father John? The divil's in the prastes, but they have a terrible hoult on the women!"

Mr. Delahunt attacked the repast with zest, while Mr. Malone made no disguise of his own enjoyment, smacking his lips heartily when it was over.

"Well, glory be to God!" he exclaimed, thrusting back his chair. "That's a good square male, though it's meself that says it. An' I hope you enjoyed it, Misther Delahunt?"

"Indade, then, but I did, an' it's the best male I've had this many a long day," replied Mr. Delahunt, opening the two lower buttons of his waistcoat.

"There's nothin' like a good square male to make a man feel comfortable. Fill yir glass, me friend, an' light yir pipe. Whisht! What's that?"

Some one had started playing the piano in the opposite room, followed by the rich tones of Maureen's voice.

"It's mighty fine," said Mr. Delahunt, "whativer it is."

Bursting into a chuckle, Mr. Malone slapped himself on the knee.

"It's Maureen," he explained, "an' the new schoolmasther. Sure, they're as thick as pays in a pod. He's tachin' Maureen how to sing. Though, by me troth, I think she sings betther when she's thrippin' about the house or motherin' some of the Carrickmachree babbies."

Putting his elbows on the table, Mr. Delahunt puffed his pipe, Mr. Malone sitting back with his legs crossed nursing a tumbler on his knee.

"He's a poor-lookin' creature anyhow," remarked Mr. Delahunt.

"Ay, troth, he's not much to look at, but a dacent, quiet chap," said Mr. Malone with a nod, "an' a power of larnin. I'm thinkin' Father John's found his match as far as larnin's consarned. Though, be the same token, the rale larnin' for Carrickmachree is to tache them how to mind their clothes an' folla the plough. I niver could see what plain, workin' people want wid book larnin'. But, maybe, it's bekase I'm no scholard meself."

"Aw, you know enough," said Mr. Delahunt. "There's no man kin make corn grow like Mather Malone of Carrickmachree, an' all the world knows it!"

"Go on now," said Mr. Malone, not ill-pleased. "Sure it's jokin' y'are. Man alive! Ye'r not goin'?"

Mr. Delahunt, who had stood up, was buttoning his coat.

"Sure, then, axin yir pardon," said he, "if I don't go Mrs. Delahunt'll lose her raison. And it's behoulden I am to you for a fine male, good luck to it!"

"Well, well," said Mr. Malone, "if you must go I'll walk down a bit of the road, the night's so fine."

"Faith an' welcome!"

They went out and parted at the cross-roads. Returning, Mr. Malone walked with his hands behind his back, a beaming smile on his broad, sunburned face. As he neared the farmhouse he paused to listen to Maureen's song. Then raising his face to the starry sky, he laughed exultingly.

"The bist harvest," he exclaimed "for twinty years! Praises be to God for all His mercies!"

CHAPTER VII

SHADOW OF A MIRACLE

MRS. MALONE with Jackeen hurried on towards the priest's house, Jackeen carrying the basket of chickens whilst holding on to his mother's cloak with the other hand. Father John, who had been waiting for them, his overcoat on, stood up when they entered.

"Welkim!" said he, taking his hat and muffler from the table. "What's that ye'v got, Jackeen, me boy?"

Taking the basket from the boy's hands, Mrs. Malone herself placed it on the table, standing back from it with a pleasant smile.

"Sure, it's nothin' at all, only a couple of chickens," she explained, "an' a few nice onions. Nothin' to spake of!"

"Why, God bless you!" said Father John. "It's yirself has the big heart, achushla. Jackeen, run down to the kitchen an' give thim to Mrs. Doran an' then come afther yir mother an' me."

Out on the road Father John tramped sturdily along with his stout blackthorn, Mrs. Malone beside him. Presently Jackeen, having caught them up, was sent on in front with the key of the sacristy.

"A good gossoon, Heaven be praised!" observed Father John. "A rale good boy!"

"In troth, all that," responded Mrs. Malone, contentedly.

In the dusk Father John, having peered at her from under his hat, touched her soft arm with a forefinger.

"He's more nor that," said he, "as ye'll find. That boy'll be heard of very soon. He's bin gifted be Heaven, as I'll prove to you. It's somethin' to be proud of to be the mother of a saint!"

"Wisha, of a saint!" repeated Mrs. Malone, startled. "Father John!"

Father John looked mysteriously all about.

"Whisht!" said he. "Spake undher yir breath, achushla. The boy's a saint, sure enough. Thank God for it! Ye'll know more by an' by. It's hard on me talkin' going up this terrible hill at my time of life. Wurra, but it's tirrible to have to climb up to me jooties like a chimpanzay!"

"Poor Father John," said she; adding in a lower tone, "A saint? What does it mane, I wondher?"

Although the moon was hidden behind the summit, they could see high up on the hill that the starlight was making shimmering squares of the windows of the little chapel, burnishing the roof and giving vague outline to the encircling tombstones. When they arrived Father John, leaving Mrs. Malone in the sacristy, went with his acolyte, Jackeen, to light the candles near the altar. Left alone in the dim chamber, Mrs. Malone became so nervous, that she welcomed their return with a start of relief. When she stood up, however, Father John pressed her gently back to the seat.

"Sit down," said he, impressively. "My boy," he added, turning to Jackeen, "lave me alone wid yir mother for two minutes. I don't want," he explained to her, as Jackeen faded silently into the dark depths of the aisle, "to have it said be me innimies later on that he or meself said anythin' to you that'd inflooinse you wan way or the other. But I'm goin' to tell you now why I axed you to come."

Seating himself so as to face her he took hold of her hand.

"Don't be narvous, avic," said he. "Remimber ye'r wid yir praste an' no harm kin come next or nigh you. I've sint for you bekase ye'r gifted with grace, an' a swate, religious mind an' heart, an' it's meself has intersaded wid the Blessed Vargin an' the howly saints for you. Yir hand thrimbles. But don't be narvous. Listen t' me now. There have bin sthrange things happenin, an' its the grace of Heaven ye'v lived to know them an' to be the mother of the sainted boy that tould them to me first. I'll say no more now. Come wid me, achushla. Lane on me. Don't be afraid."

Trembling from head to foot, Mrs. Malone pressed heavily on his stout arm as they passed into the church. Standing before the front seats, Father John peered down into the darkness of the aisle.

"Are you there, Jackeen?" he whispered.

From the far end of the church came the faint reply, "Here, father."

"That's right, my son," said Father John. "Stay there now. Be silent.. Not a move. Now, avic," to Mrs. Malone, "here's the sate. Sit down in God's name. I'll sit beside you."

As she sat down Mrs. Malone heaved a deep, nervous sigh.

"Whisht!" said Father John in a warning whisper. "Fix yir eyes on the face of the Blissed Vargin an' say nothin'. Only tell me whin you see anythin'."

"Oh, Father John!"

With shaking hands she clutched his arm while she watched the candlelight flickering about the wooden statue.

"What? What is it?" asked Father John hastily. "Spake, achushla. What do you see?"

"Oh, Father John," said Mrs. Malone, with a catch in her voice, "I see nothin'. Is there anythin' wrong?"

"Anythin' wrong?" retorted Father John, impatiently. "Bless the woman! There's nothin' wrong, achushla. Don't mind me. Lane up an' kape yir eyes fixed as I tould you."

Sinking back in the seat, she pressed her hands closely together in her lap as she obediently watched the effect of the uncertain light on the wooden figures; and there was a long spell of silence.

"D'you see anythin' yet?" asked Father John anxiously at last.

"No, father."

"Nothin'!" he exclaimed; then after a pause, lowering his voice, "Are you sure? Nothin' at all?"

Mrs. Malone collapsed against his shoulder.

"Oh, Father John!" said she, in a sobbing voice. "What is it? What is it you want me to see?"

Shaking himself free, Father John sat bolt upright.

"What do I want you to see?" he angrily repeated.

"I don't want you to see anythin'. Yir own blessed son kem to me an' tould me of the miracle ——"

"Miracle?" gasped Mrs. Malone.

"Yis," returned Father John, leaning towards her to whisper. "He's seen the eyes of the Blessed Vargin movin'—an' more nor that. But I see now ye'r not the woman I thought you wor' ——"

"Oh, Father John!"

Having gripped his arm again, she was staring towards the statue. He caught his breath.

"I do. I think I do. I—I see it!" she whispered! "Yes, it does look like—— Let me go away now, Father. I can't stay ——"

"That's enough. Ye'r a blessed woman. Jackeen!" he called in a loud voice as he rose to face the aisle. "Kim up! Yir mother's seen it too. Glory to all the saints in paradise this night! Come, achushla. You naden't spake. An', remimber, not a word to a sowl!"

Despite his encouraging words, she was tottering, and would indeed have fallen but for the timely aid of his right arm. Jackeen coming softly up also helped to support his mother. They led her back into the sacristy, where Father John insisted on her having a mouthful of brandy, which helped to revive her.

"An' now," said he, "it's time to be gettin' home. Honor Malone, listen to me. Ye'v had a special act of grace performed for you to-night. Ye'r a new woman from this momint, consecrated to the special care of the saints. Not a word of what ye'v seen to-night unless I give you lave. D'you mind me?"

"Yes, Father John," she faintly replied, as she rose with the aid of Jackeen.

Out in the open she felt stronger. As they went together down the hill Father John kept exclaiming, as if in an ecstasy—

"She's seen it! She's seen the eyes movin'! Glory to all the saints!"

Half-way down, when Jackeen came panting behind them, Father John halted and wheeled round. Catching Mrs. Malone by the arm, he pointed upwards.

"Look there, Honor Malone!" he cried. "Heaven itself has consecrated yir vision by the glory of its light!"

While they had been in the sacristy the moon had shot up over the summit of the hill, and the chapel with its little belfry, the bell and dangling chain, the pallid tombstones and the white path to the porch were revealed in detail. And Honor Malone caught her breath.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. DELAHUNT DESPONDENT

ON a high stool in a corner of his shop Mr. Delahunt sat crouched, ruling long money-columns in a cash book, to-morrow being market day. Presently, when he heard the familiar greeting, "God save all here!" he slid off the stool, steadying himself with a hand on the counter.

"An' you too, Father John!" he exclaimed. "Sure, it's meself's glad to see you. Won't you step in, yir riverence?"

Father John, who had merely put his head round the doorway, approached the counter over which Mr. Delahunt bent, his hands spread out, a weak smile on his anxious face.

"I didn't come to stay, Misther Delahunt," said Father John, wiping his face with the ends of his muffler. "How's business goin' wid you? I hope well?"

With a shake of the head, the litfle shopkeeper relapsed into his habitual gloom.

"Troth, 'twas never good, as you know, yir riverence," said he. "But I'm hopin' to-morra'll kape us busy,

plase God. Would you plase to take a drop of somethin', sir, if I may make so bould?"

Father John shook his right hand tremulously in the air.

"Thank you, thank you, Misther Delahunt," said he. "Not a dhrop. I'm behoulden to you, all the same. I kem in just for a minute for a word wid yir good wife, if she's on the primises."

Scratching his head a moment, Mr. Delahunt looked towards his desk, then stared hard at Father John.

"A word with Mrs. Delahunt, yir riverence?" he repeated, cautiously.

"If she's on the primises," said Father John, shortly.

Suddenly brightening, Mr. Delahunt slapped his hands together.

"Of coorse, of coorse," he exclaimed. "Why not, yir riverence? She's upstairs this minute. If ye'll kindly take a sate, sir, I'll run up an' fetch her."

"Thank you. God bless you!"

With these words Father John, hooking forward a chair with his stick, seated himself in the doorway, staring heavily out at the patch of sunlight, while some children having peeped timidly at him, abruptly disappeared when he cleared his throat. Meanwhile Mr. Delahunt, having mounted the domestic staircase at the back of the shop, reached the top landing, where he sat down on a step with his hands between his knees, his brows tightened. When he had remained in this attitude for some time the door behind was suddenly opened, and Mrs. Delahunt, bearing the baby at her breast, came out.

"What is the matter, Patrick?" she asked.

Instantly rising, Mr. Delahunt, pallid with excitement, faced her.

"Whisht!" said he in a loud whisper. "For the love of God go back to yir room. It's nothin', only a slight wakeness."

"A slight wakeness!" repeated Mrs. Delahunt, patting the baby on the back as she stared at her husband. "Sure, that's a mighty quare place——"

Spreading out his arms to prevent her advancing, Mr. Delahunt pointed with trembling finger towards the open door of her room.

"Go in there," he implored, "an' lave me alone. Whin I git a wakeness like this I'm betther alone. For the love of Heaven go in an' nurse the babby."

There was an expression of suspicious surprise in his wife's faded eyes, but she turned, still patting the baby on the back, and re-entered the room, Mr. Delahunt instantly closing the door tightly behind her. He paused a moment, his fingers on the handle, his ear close to the door; then assuming an air of cheerfulness, tripped down the stairs back to the shop. Slowly rising, Father John turned towards him expectantly.

"Sure, Father John," explained Mr. Delahunt rubbing his hands briskly together, "it's sorry I am to disappoint you, but me wife's got a rale bad toothache, a terrible toothache intirely, yir riverence, an' begs you to excuse her. She's tarin' sorry, sir, but in that pain ye'd pity the poor cratur."

"Now, that's too bad, that's too bad, intirely!" said Father John. "I thought I heard her spakin' on the sthairs. She's got a bad toothache thin?"

"Truth she has, yir riverence," said Mr. Delahunt,

with a mournful shake of the head. "An' it's a pity to see her havin' to nurse the babby an' she in mortial pain. But maybe yir riverence'll lave a message for her, sir?"

Father John began methodically to help himself to a slow pinch of snuff, Mr. Delahunt standing close by, craning his neck with anxious respect, while he rubbed one hand on the back of the other and stood mostly on tiptoe. Presently Father John held out the open snuff-box, and Mr. Delahunt, with an air of profound gratitude, helped himself to a tiny pinch.

"No, no," said Father John at length, shutting up the box with a snap and returning it to his pocket. "I'll call round agin in the evenin', whin I hope she'll be well enough for a couple of minutes. Tell her I'm sorry to hear she's not well an' I'll call agin. Good-day now, an' God bless you!"

With much obsequious bending, and still walking mostly on tiptoe, Mr. Delahunt followed his distinguished visitor to the door, and, having smilingly bowed him out, returned into the solitude of the shop with a face contracted in the anguish of apprehension.

Scarcely had he retired to his desk, when he was startled by the voice of his wife, who leaned over the bannisters.

"Patrick," she screamed, "I've seen Father John goin' down the sthrate. Was that him was here?"

As she came half-way down the stairs, Mr. Delahunt went towards her with a surprised air.

"Ay," he answered, "he just put in his head to bid the time of day. That's all."

"Is that all?" repeated Mrs. Delahunt, doubtfully.

"Ay, troth. Whist, alanna, here's a customer."

Someone had entered the shop. It was Mr. Malone, whose honest faced beamed as he cracked his riding-whip in the air, narrowly missing the old brass lamp swinging from the centre of the smoked ceiling.

"An' how's the world usin' you, Misther Delahunt?"

"Faith, only middlin'. How's yirself?"

"Never better, thanks be to God! There's a terrible fine harvist starin' me in the face. An' that's the best news for twinty year. It'll give a power of employmint. An how's herself?"

"Whisht!"

In his nervous way Mr. Delahunt stole to the first steps of the staircase, where he stood looking up and listening for some time, returning with a look of relief.

"Will you step in here a minute, Mr. Malone, if you plase?" said he, leading the way to the snuggery reserved for select parties on market-day.

When they had entered, Mr. Delahunt, having closed the door, put his back against it. Mr. Malone looked round for a seat. It was a small compartment with a long, plain table smeared by the marks of bottles and glasses; two wooden forms ran each side, and a little window looked out on the back yard. Having made the circuit of the table, Mr. Malone sat down with his back to the window.

"What'll you take?" asked Mr. Delahunt.

"Nothin' at all!" replied Mr. Malone, cheerfully. "I just dropped in as I was passin' to see if you wor all alive. By the same token, I met Father John down the sthrate."

Mr. Delahunt, who had been feverishly scratching his chin, wiped his damp forehead with the back of his hand, and came closer to his friend.

"Mr. Malone," said he, "ye'v always proved a big-hearted friend, an' I think I may ax you for a favour."

"Lay it there!" said Mr. Malone, in his heartiest tones.

Stretching out his powerful hand, he gave Mr. Delahunt's thin fingers a squeeze that brought tears into the little shopkeeper's eyes.

"It's about Mrs. Delahunt," explained Mr. Delahunt. "Father John's bin here axin' to see her, an' I dunno what he wants wid her. But I put him off an' he's comin' round in the evenin'. Now, Mr. Malone, if I could send her down, d'you see"—he winked painfully, touching the farmer timidly on the frieze coat—"to your place on wan pretence or another; for to-morra's market-day, an' if there's any religious obsarvances to go on, or the likes of that, the whole business 'll be spoilt. You remimber she wasn't worth a thraneen durin the Rethrate of the Dominican Fathers last year beyant in Bohanabree. It'd be the same now. An'—there's another matther——"

Mr. Malone, who had listened with a cheerful smile, became grave at the serious anxiety on the little man's face; and, Mr. Delahunt having paused, was scratching his face as if he wanted to draw blood.

"Out with it!" said Mr. Malone, laying a kindly hand on the bent shoulder, "I'll do you a good turn if I can. Mrs. Malone hasn't bin herself ayther since she was up the other night wid Father John. An' when a strong, healthy woman like her is upset, what kin you expect from a wake, delikit crature like Mrs. Delahunt."

"Sure, that's it!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt, excitedly raising his voice, then looking hurriedly round as if

dreading other listeners. "There's a thing that has always bin on me mind iver since the boy was born. Now, we've had five girls, dacent good children they are, God bless them!"

"Amen!" interposed Mr. Malone.

"But," continued Mr. Delahunt feverishly, "whin the little chap was born I said, 'Here now's what I wanted—a lad to train up to the business.'"

"Well, an' so you will!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, sympathetically. "So you will, plase God! He'll be a credit to you. He'll be yir right hand when ye'r ould, as Dismond'll be to me."

"Ay, there it is," said Mr. Delahunt. "It's bin on me mind the thought of Mrs. Delahunt gettin' these religious attacks while she's nursin' the boy. I wouldn't mind so much if he was waned. But whin I think howly wather may be gettin' mixed up in his milk, it takes the slape out of my eyes in the night. I don't want the boy, now that he's come afther five girls, I don't want him to grow up like—like some I know."

"You mane like Jackeen?" suggested Mr. Malone, with a good-natured laugh.

Mr. Delahunt protested with both hands raised.

"Sure, I wouldn't say a word agin any mimber of yir family," said he "not for all the goold in South Afrikay."

"Whether you would or not," said Mr. Malone, "Jackeen's a rale howly-wather babby, though you wouldn't think it to look at his mother. But I understand you, Misther Delahunt. There's raison enough in what you say. An' I see now it's best to kape Mrs. Delahunt away from excitement as much as you can."

"If you wouldn't mind, thin," urged Mr. Delahunt, "I would sind her round to inquire afther your good wife this evenin'. Betwane ourselves, an' no wan a bit the wiser."

Rising, Mr. Malone slapped him vigorously on the shoulder.

"Right!" said he. "You can just say I axed her to drop round, an' we'll kape her for a bit of supper."

Mr. Delahunt brightened and, shaking hands at the front door again, stood there admiring the broad shoulders of the farmer down the street.

CHAPTER IX

THAT IMPROVEMENT SOCIETY

FROM the top of the main street Sergeant Mulcahy faced the animated aspect of market-day. The peak of his German cap, pulled a little lower than usual, hid the quick motions of his eyes, which followed the movements of Larry Magee, who was stirring in and out through the groups. Greeting one frieze-coated friend after another, Larry rushed them into a public-house, to reappear after a few minutes and repeat the action. There was a method in these movements which aroused the interest of the white-headed sergeant, who likewise observed that, while Larry worked one side of the street, his young master, Desmond Malone, seemed engaged in a similar manner on the other. In the most unobtrusive way Sergeant Mulcahy sauntered across to Larry's side of the thoroughfare, proceeding slowly and with some difficulty. At length he arrived within hailing distance of Larry, who, at the moment, had a hand on the shoulder of a strong young mountaineer, whose sunburnt face glowed a deeper red under Larry's low-pitched eloquence. There were some women with shawls close about their head, and men in rough frieze around the pair, but no one seemed to be

interested in them save Sergeant Mulcahy, who stood modestly back in the shade of a thatched roof. Suddenly Larry saw the sergeant, when, without barely an instant's pause, his mysterious manner changed to one of open hilarity.

"So, I tell you, Pat," he almost shouted, "sell the boneens for whativer you kin get. Goodbye, an' mind yirself!"

The astonished mountaineer gaped after him for an explanation of this aimless advice, but Larry, having violently shaken the powerful hand, disappeared from view into the nearest public-house. A few minutes later he put his head out, wiping his lips with his sleeve, and gazed cautiously up and down. Then he came on to the thoroughfare, and Sergeant Mulcahy instantly appeared from the precincts of a horseless cart.

"Well, Misther Magee," he said, with a careless nod, "there sames a lively market to-day."

Striking an attitude of delighted surprise, and smacking his hands together, Larry stepped brightly towards the sergeant as if he was the dearest friend in the world.

"The top of the morning to you, Sergeant! Sure enough, it's a big market, thanks be to God! An' it's badly wanted, you know, sir. The shopkeepers have bin complainin' of the want of business."

"You same to have a lot of friends," remarked the Sergeant, gazing steadily across the street, where a group showed some quarrelsome symptoms.

Larry laughed good-humouredly.

"Ay, be the powers, thin, there's a lot of ould friends of mine here to-day."

"If you have to thrate them all as you'v thrated them six young fellas, one after another, there won't be much left of yir week's wages."

"Six?" said Larry. "Arra, go on now, Sergeant. Did I thrate six already?"

The quarrelsome group having apparently become the best of friends, adjourned into the darksome entrance of the near shop, which, like most of its kind, had a license to sell beer and spirits on the premises. The sergeant slowly turned to look over Larry's head down the street.

"Ay," said he absently, "you thrated six lads one afther another, an' I know the names of iv'ry one. Isn't that quare now? Is it recruits ye'r after?"

"Recruits, sergeant?" said Larry, with a marked alteration of his hilarity. "Recruits for what, thin? Is it a recruitin' sergeant you want to make of me?"

"Why, recruits for the Improvement Sissiety," explained the sergeant, turning to walk slowly down, whilst Larry thought it better to fall into step beside him.

"Well, it's yirself's fond of a joke," exclaimed Larry, with a laugh. "That isn't bad, faith! Larry Magee a recruitin' sergeant! Stan' out of the way there, Mike. Don't you see Sergeant Mulcahy? Ay, ma'am, mind that ould ass of yours. Ye'v bin givin' him a feed of oats, an' he wants to run away wid the krale of turf. Recruits! Sure, it's humbuggin' me y'are, Sergeant."

With an expression of innocent amusement Larry looked sideways at the sergeant's immovable face and chuckled.

"Bedad, I'm thinkin' it's recruits ye're afther," said the sergeant quietly. "An' there's Misther Dismond

at the same game since ten o'clock. It's wonderful the zale you have in the cause!"

"Misther Dismond?" exclaimed Larry, incredulously. "I haven't set eyes on him since yistherda."

Halting, the sergeant faced round towards the open thoroughfare.

"Well, stan' here," said he, "an' look over there. D'you see Mary Kinchella's? D'ye mind thim people there? Look at Misther Dismond talkin' there to young Fitzgerald of Ballyrath just as you were talkin' yourself to Pat Dinnehy of Mullinrogue. What d'you say now?"

"Sure, there he is right enough!" cried Larry, with profound amazement. "Isn't it yirself has the eyes of a hawk, Sergeant? But why shouldn't he talk to the people? There's no harm in it, is there?"

"I niver said there was."

"Of coorse not. Maybe he'd hear me if I called. I say, Misther Dismond!"

This feeble attempt at a shout made by Larry caused the sergeant to glance at him in surprise.

"He doesn't hear me," explained Larry, with a faint grin.

Then, suddenly placing two fingers between his lips, he gave three rapid whistles—two short followed by one long—so piercing that they were instantly heard above the hubbub of the market. As if he had been shot Desmond wheeled about, saw Larry on the other side standing close to the sergeant, and, turning again, disappeared down a by-lane.

"He heard you, but he didn't come," observed the sergeant grimly. "Is there to be a meetin' of the Improvement Sissiety to-night?"

"There y'are, Misther O'Keeffe!" shouted Larry across the road. "The top of the morning t'you! That's a rale dacent man," he added to the sergeant, lowering his voice confidentially. "If you don't mind, Sergeant, I'll say goodbye now, as I've some purchases to make for the masther."

"Are you going across the road?" asked the sergeant, facing him.

"Am I going across the road?" repeated Larry, as if the question was the most puzzling on earth.

"Or down the road?" asked the sergeant.

"Or down the road?" repeated Larry, as before.

Raising his cap to scratch his head, he stared stupidly at the rough pavement.

"Why, of course. I'm goin' down the road a bit, and thin across," he explained.

"All right," said the sergeant, as Larry wheeled about. "I'll just walk down a bit with you. Is there to be a meetin' of the Improvement Sissiety to-night?"

"More power t' you, Jemmy!" shouted Larry to an imaginary acquaintance at a distance. "Give the mare a dry bit of hay. It's a rale good market, Sergeant, thanks be to God!"

"It is," said the sergeant. "Is there to be a meetin' of the Improvement Sissiety to-night?"

"Stan' out of the way there!" cried Larry, thrusting aside an old woman who was carrying a large basket of carrots and onions. "Don't you see the sergeant? Well, Sergeant, ye'll excuse me, but I see Tom Rafferty over there; good-day, sir. Hullo, Tom! I say, Tom! Misther Rafferty!"

Suddenly diving at right angles across the road, he

became lost in the thicket medley of carts, apple-stands, and vociferating peasants.

The sergeant walked quietly away with his thumbs in his belt.

Half an hour later Larry emerged from a public-house in the furthest end of the town. Sitting down on the window-sill, he gazed with a hunted expression at his brogues, and, lifting his cap, wiped his troubled brows with the back of his hand. A shadow fell across him. He looked up. Before him stood Sergeant Mulcahy as impassive as ever.

"Hullo, Sergeant!" cried Larry, jumping up with every appearance of excessive delight. "Sure, I'm glad to see you agin!"

"Is there to be a meetin' of the Improvement Sissiety to-night?" asked the sergeant, with monotonous equanimity.

Screwing up his face, Larry vigorously scratched his cheek, took off his cap, turning it about and examining it, then put it on and stared at the sergeant.

"A meetin'?" he repeated.

"Of the Improvement Sissiety?" added the sergeant, his thumbs in his belt.

There was silence between them, broken by the noise of a tumult. Both men turned, the sergeant swiftly, alert, but composed; Larry Magee with his mouth agape and eyes staring.

"Bedad, Sergeant!" exclaimed Larry; "there's a row at Misther Delahunt's!"

Next instant he was gone. Sergeant Mulcahy, pulling his belt round, walked quietly after. Some people had rushed or staggered violently from Mr. Delahunt's doorway. The crowd on the footway, at

the unexpected accession to their numbers, surged and became confused. Several stepped back amongst the carts; women screamed and looked about for their children. Forcing his way to the door, and holding on to the post, Larry Magee thrust in his head and stared with all his eyes.

The first person he saw was Father John, whose long upper lip was pressed hard on the under one whilst he struck his blackthorn on the floor.

"You desaved me!" shouted Father John. "Now I don't want any excuses; you desaved me!"

Then Larry saw Mr. Delahunt behind, his two hands beseechingly outstretched as he obsequiously followed the angry clergyman. The little shopkeeper, in shirt-sleeves and apron, his scanty grey hair tossed in tufts, seemed almost overcome with terror.

"Father John! Father John!" he implored. "Don't dinounce me before the people till ye'v heard me defince!"

Turning angrily upon him, Father John, purple with rage even to the depths of his double chin, stamped his blackthorn again.

"I'll have no defince!" said he. "You want to kape yir wife from her parish praste. I kem here yistherda' mornin'," he added, glowering at the shrinking little man, who put up his hands in futile protest, "an' axed for yir wife, an' you put me off be saying she was sick. I kem here yistherda' evenin', an' you put me off, sayin' she was gone to Misther Malone's. Ye'r a nice man to prevaricate an' twist in the prisence of yir praste, Misther Delahunt, I'm ashamed of you!"

"For the love of Heaven, Father John!" implored

Mr. Delahunt, ghastly with apprehension. "Ye'll ruin me if you say another word!"

"I don't want to ruin you," said Father John, "but I must have obadience in me flock. I don't want any black sheep. An' what I say to you, Mr. Delahunt, is Beware! I give you a caution!"

At this moment Mrs. Delahunt, with bonnet and shawl on, the baby boy in her arms, came hurrying down the stairs.

"He doesn't desarve any marcy from you, Father John!" she exclaimed hysterically. "He wanted," she added, turning furiously on her husband, "to kape me from me praste!"

"Molly! Molly!" cried Mr. Delahunt. "Don't you see the people? Don't you know it's market-day, an' the babby at yir breast!"

"What do I care who sees me?" exclaimed Mrs. Delahunt, half laughing and half crying. "You wanted to kape yir wife from her parish praste! I'm ready now, Father John."

"Thin come, me child," said Father John, preparing to leave. "Misther Delahunt, I'm givin' you a warnin'; don't let me have to repate it!"

He went out, all the people parting respectfully, the men touching their hats, the women curtseying. Close behind him came Mrs. Delahunt with a look of pride.

Sinking on a bench, Mr. Delahunt dropped his face on the counter.

"An' the babby at her breast!" he moaned.

Sergeant Mulcahy saluted Father John as he passed, then looked sharply round for Larry; but Larry Magee had disappeared.

CHAPTER X

LARRY FLINGS UP HIS CAP

AS soon as he was clear of the town Larry ran fast for the farm. He went through the gateway on his right beside the house, turning to the rear on his left, past kitchen, wash-house, and dairy, and dashing into the stable-yard began to shout—

"Misther Dismond, are you there? Are you there, Misther Dismond?"

Then he stared about and listened, but the only sound was the champing of hay and the stamping of hoofs from the open doors of the stables. Once more, and yet again, he shouted, but with the same result. Finally he crossed to the centre of the yard, and sitting down on the stone basin of the pump thrust back his cap, and for a while nursed his brow in his hand. The stirring of the horses in their stalls roused him at length. Rising, he took off his coat, and settled down to work. Maureen, coming from the house, found him in shirt-sleeves, his corduroy trousers strapped under each knee. He was rubbing down a mare with a wisp of hay.

"I heard you callin' for Dismond," said Maureen,

approaching him. "Have you seen him, Larry? He's not in the house."

"Sure, I know he's not there, miss," said Larry, looking up. "He won't be there for many a long day, I'm afeard."

Seeing the affrighted look in her eyes, he caught himself by the mouth a moment with contrite expression.

"Well, it's the long-tongued fool I am!" he exclaimed. "An' Misther Dismond tould me not to—— But, sure, it's terrible hard not to spake about it."

He bent down to examine the mare's hoof.

"What d' you mean, Larry? Dismond hasn't been home for four days now. Is there anythin' wrong? Oh, Larry! you'll tell me, won't you?"

Holding the hoof a moment he looked up, straightened himself, and drew the back of his hand across his mouth.

"Well, miss, I won't deceive you, for it's a cruel thing. Here's the masther himself tells Misther Dismond to his face that he stole an ould jar of whiskey. D'you mind that, miss? Misther Dismond stale a jar of whiskey! As if he'd stretch his hand to stale a jar of dimonds, not to spake of whiskey! But that's how it all kem about. An' Misther Dismond swore he'd niver enter the house agin. He tould me so, an' why not? Haven't I follied him like a dog, over hill an' dale, since I was that high? Wouldn't I go through fire an' wather for him?"

"But Dismond must come back!" exclaimed Maureen. "You must go an' bring him back, Larry—at once!"

Larry, who had turned his back on the mare, resting his left arm on the mane, smiled feebly and shook his head.

"Sure, miss, that's a quare thing to say," he remarked. "I don't belave there's any wan outside the family he likes betther nor me, an' that's a fact. But if," he added with extreme seriousness, "I was to up an' go betwane Misther Dismond an' the pride of him, be jabers! he'd crack me neck. Beggin' yir pardin, Miss Maureen, but that's as thrue as gospel. He'd crack me neck before I could turn round. Sure, there's not a prouder young man in the county than Misther Dismond, spite of his aisy ways wid all kinds of people. You know that yirself, miss."

"But why doesn't he come home an' explain to father?" exclaimed Maureen.

Larry made a grimace and, screwing up his face, scratched the back of his head.

"Well, miss, you see, he knows an' I know where the ould jar wint, but I'm not goin' to tell you. Isn't that quare? But I'm bound over to kape the pace be Misther Dismond, an' whin he orders that's enough for me an' the likes of me."

Whilst Maureen, breathing quickly, stared in bewilderment at this statement, she heard the sound of whistling in the outer yard.

"That's father!" she exclaimed.

"Ay, miss," assented Larry, turning to his work. "Yir dada's comin' in, an' if you hurry ye'll mate him scraping the clay off his brogues outside the kitchen door."

Running through the gateway into the kitchen yard, Maureen found her father balancing his big figure

with outspread hand against the wall, next the back door, while he wiped his heavy boots with a wad of hay. Thus employed, he whistled cheerfully. As she came towards him, he flung the wad against the water barrel, straightened himself, and rubbed his hot hands with a large cotton handkerchief.

"Dads!" said Maureen, breathlessly.

Drawing back his head as he replaced the handkerchief in the bosom of his frieze coat, he smiled broadly at her flushed face.

"Is it Maureen I see?" said he, "or is it dhramin' I am? Is it the little girl that used to clutch her ould father's grey hairs wid her chubby little hands an' pull down his ould face to kiss him on the tip of the nose? Is it dhramin' I am to see a big woman like this foreninst me?"

"Dads, I want to tell you——" panted Maureen.

"Of coorse you want to tell me," said he, placing both hands on her shoulders, playfully rocking her as he spoke. "Misther O'Flaherty's come to ask you to marry him an' offer you the dogcart to take me an' yir mother to the weddin'——"

"No, dads, not that!"

"'No, dads, it's not that,'" he repeated. "It's Jimmy O'Callaghan wid the curly head that's atin' his heart out for purty Maureen an' sits foreninst her wid his eyes cast down afeared to say a word to her. Is that it, mavrone?"

"No, dads," said Maureen, blushing at these direct insinuations. "It's not that at all, at all. It's nothin' to do with them kind of people. It's about Dismond."

His big hands dropped from her shoulders to his sides, his bantering smile vanished.

"About Dismond?" he repeated slowly.. "What's he bin doin' now? Somethin' harebrained, I'll be bound. Out wid it, Maureen!"

Moving closer to him, she looked up anxiously into his overclouded face, holding him tightly by the sleeve.

"Listen, dads," said she. "You know Dismond hasn't bin at home for the last four days——"

"Sure, that's nothin' new," interrupted her father. "Isn't he a good-for-nothin' harum-scarum, that puts a gun under his arm an' goes off for days, shootin' blackbirds an' rabbits?"

"But, dads, this is worse than shootin' rabbits. Dismond says—" Maureen had a sobbing catch in her voice that startled her father—"he says he'll—he'll never come home agin!"

"Niver come home?" said her father. "An' why, in the name of God?"

Maureen rubbed her eyes with her knuckles.

"I don't know, dads. Somethin' about a jar of whiskey or somethin'—I don't know what."

Throwing back his head, his mouth opened wide a moment.

"Well, well, well," he reiterated, "to think of that now. The young Turk! So, he's got hoity-toity? Well, well, well. Wait a minute. I'll go and see Larry Magee, an' sind him for Dismond. To think of that! The jar of whiskey. An' I'd forgot all about it. Well, well, well!"

"Oh yes, dads," exclaimed Maureen. "Send for poor Dismond. Don't have him breakin' his heart!"

Seizing her father's hand, she kissed it. Turning,

he walked quickly through the gateway, stood in the stable-yard and looked around. Then, with stentorian voice, he roared—

"Larry! Are you there, Larry?"

Larry, who had finished grooming the mare, came out from the stable leading another by the forelock and carrying a bucket of water.

"Come here, Larry."

As he spoke, Mr. Malone himself approached. Halting the mare just outside the stable door, Larry laid down the bucket.

"D'you know where Misther Dismond is, Larry, agra?"

"I do not, sir," replied Larry.

"Well, you may go an' find him," said Mr. Malone. "An' tell him from me my orders are he's to come home at wanst an' no more nonsense: Travarsin' the counthry wid his head up bekase I thought he stole a jar of whiskey."

"Is it Misther Dismond stale?" exclaimed Larry, with profound contempt for the insinuation. "D'you mane that Misther Dismond'd stoop to stale anythin'—a jar of goold much less a jar of whiskey?"

"An' supposin' I said he did?" said Mr. Malone, angrily. "What'd you say to that?"

"I'd say you war a liar," said Larry.

"Be the God of war, give me a stick!" roared Mr. Malone, looking hurriedly about.

Stepping back to the stable, Larry disappeared a moment behind the door and emerged with a stout ash plant in his hand.

"Here's a stick, sir," said he. "Maybe that'll do you."

"Ay, that'll do!" cried Mr. Malone snatching it and switching at the air. "Now, thin, d'you say I'm a liar?"

"If you or any man," observed Larry, "says that Misther Dismond'd rob, thin I say that you or any man that says it is a liar, an' a damned liar! An' if you strike me with that stick, sir, it's the first and last time ye'll iver do it!"

Standing with hands behind his back, Larry's face blanched, but not from fear. Mr. Malone bent the ash plant again and again, while he trembled with passion.

"Go!" he shouted. "Go to him an' tell him I order him home——"

"He'll niver come home," exclaimed Larry.

"What!" roared Mr. Malone, advancing a step with the stick aloft. "Say that agin——"

"He's too proud!" shouted Larry without stirring. "He'll niver come back to the home of a man that calls him a robber. An' quite right too!"

"Now!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, furiously. "Now, be the God of war, I'll kill you!"

"No, dads, no, no!"

Maureen was beside him, catching his arm as he swung the stick.

"Let me go, Maureen. Go inside. Let me go till I chastise him."

She threw her arms about his neck, clinging closely to him. For some moments his bosom heaved with rage, then, dropping the stick, he slowly stroked her head. She looked up at him and saw his lips trembling. Abruptly lifting the bucket, Larry sluiced the hind hoofs of the mare.

"Larry," said Mr. Malone, quietly, looking over his daughter's head.

Larry loudly smacked the mare on the haunches as she turned to re-enter the stable.

"Larry Magee," said Mr. Malone.

Slowly and sulkily Larry turned.

"Larry," said Mr. Malone, "go to Dismond an' tell him from me, that he's too hard on his ould father. Say that from me, Larry, an' ax him—to—forgive his ould fool of a father. Will you say that, Larry?"

"No, be japers, I won't," said Larry, turning away to wipe his eyes with his sleeve. "But I'll bring him back, sir, safe an' sound!"

"Do, an' God bless you!" said Mr. Malone. "Maureen, avic, come in wid me, for I hear the schoolmaster at the pianny."

"Hullo, Larry, are you there?" shouted a fresh voice, and Desmond suddenly shot through the gateway, pulling himself up in front of his father, Larry looking on with stupefaction from the rear. For a moment Mr. Malone gazed on his son with deep pride, then advanced towards him holding out his hands.

"My Dismond, my own boy! Shake yir ould dad be the hand an' say you forgive him."

The glance which he exchanged with Maureen revealed the situation to Desmond, who, seizing his father's hand, put it to his lips.

"It is I, father, that should ask forgiveness!" he exclaimed, with profound remorse. "If I were five years younger, father, you'd horsewhip me an' I'd desarve it!"

"No talk like that now, Dismond. Six foot two an'

the broad chist of him an' the handsome face of him. Come in," exclaimed Mr. Malone, with a joyous laugh, "wid little Maureen an' me, an' we'll git the schoolmasther to play a rale ould Irish jig!"

Arm-in-arm the three entered the house. As they disappeared Larry, from the middle of the yard, shricked a wild "Hurroo!" and his cloth cap flung high in air startled a cloud of pigeons from the sloping roofs.

CHAPTER XI

SEAGULLS STARTLED

DUSK was settling down when Desmond, coming from the house into the stable-yard, saw Larry enjoying a pipe, seated on the pump basin.

"Hullo!" observed Desmond.

Jumping up, Larry brought his hand smartly to his cap.

"Me dyin' father'd dance," said he, cheerfully, "if he saw you an' the masther friends agin. Thanks be to God!"

"Never mind your dyin' father, Larry," said Desmond. "You won't forget the matin' to-night?"

"Divil a fear, sir!" replied Larry, confidently.

"It's to be an important matin'," remarked Desmond, impressively, "an' that's why I just stepped out to remind you of it. The dilegates from the County Fermanagh'll be there."

"An' what of the schoolmasther, sir?" asked Larry, anxiously, advancing a step as the other turned to go.

Desmond faced round again.

"I'm goin' to sound him, now," said he, with a secretive nod. "He's gone down the road an' I'll

catch him up in a minute. I'm thinkin' he won't object to the secretaryship from what I can see, an' that'll take a power of writin' off my shoulders. Don't forget the matin' !"

"No fear, sir !"

Larry saluted again as Desmond, with an admonitory flourish of his hand, turned on his heel and left the yard.

Meanwhile, Martin Harrington took his way along the road. With bent head and hands clasped loosely behind his back, he walked on until within sight of the thatched roofs which began the town. The hubbub of the market had already dwindled to a mere hum. Presently, hearing a quick footstep behind, he turned. With swinging gait, his cap pushed back, Desmond came cheerily on.

"Well, an' how d'you feel now ?" he asked as they faced towards the town.

For a moment Martin made no reply. Then he raised his white, strained face.

"I'm glad," said he, "to have the opportunity of speakin' with you alone. There's somethin' on my mind. Your father has bin kind enough to offer me the hospitality of his roof for a week or so. He thinks the change'd do me good."

"That's all right !" said Desmond, moderating his step to suit that of his companion. "There's plenty of room an' to spare at the big farm. Ye'r heartily welcome !"

"That," returned Martin, flushing as he looked down, "is very kind of you."

"The divil a bit !" said Desmond.

They walked on in silence awhile, Desmond with

his head thrown back and strong chest expanded, Martin still with drooping head.

"You've all bin very kind to me," said the latter, at length. "But I've a difficulty. You're a man an' can understand. Now, it's about Miss Malone——"

He paused as if the words were choking him. Sticking his hands loosely into the pockets of his jacket, Desmond, for the moment, looked inclined to laugh.

"What's she bin doin'?" he asked.

Martin glanced up quickly at him, then down again.

"Doin'? Nothin'. It's myself. It's"—he seemed to make an effort to get out the words—"my own feelings. I don't think it's the best thing I could do to live for six days under the same roof as Miss Malone."

Desmond now laughed outright, but checked himself when he noticed the startled look on Martin's miserable face.

"I suppose you've fallen in love with Maureen?" said he, lightly.

"I—I'm afraid there's danger of it," admitted Martin, dejectedly. "An'," he hastened to add, "it's not the likes of me that should aspire to her. I'm only a—poor National teacher."

"Now, you're a straight man!" said Desmond, heartily, "to talk square to me like that. But, I'll tell you now—you're about the twentieth man that has made that confession to me. There's not a young man of any position in the county that's not daft about Maureen. But there's two strong men, O'Callaghan and O'Flaherty, an' they thry to kill each other once a

month about Maureen. If they know ye'r in the field, may God," he added reverently, "have marcy on yir sowl, for they'll have none! I only tell you this to put you on yir guard."

"Thank you," said Martin, his face more startled than before.

"But why shouldn't you have as good a chance as any?" said Desmond, kindly. "I'm a Republican out an' out, myself. I say, let the best man win, I don't care what his position."

"That's kind of you," said Martin, gratefully; "but I really don't think it's my place at all. That's why I'm afraid I must decline your father's kind invitation."

"I'll tell you what you want," observed Desmond, taking him by the arm. "A little distraction. Your mind'll get quare always tachin childher their A B C, an' you'll go mopin' with yirself after hours. Come with me an' join the Improvement Sissiety! I'll inthroduce you. You can come now to-night an' listen, an' you needn't join if you don't approve of it. What d'you think of Ireland?"

Starting at this unexpected question, Martin looked puzzled.

"What do I think?" he repeated, vaguely.

"I'll tell you what I think," said Desmond. "The great mistake that has bin made in the past is havin' a conspiracy all over the counthry. Too much orginisation! Now, my iday is a small, local risin'. Then, I say, if there's the rale spirit in the counthry we can hold out here abit until other places begin to sthir an' at last the whole counthry's up. You see, if you go on spendin' month after month, year after year, orginisin' a whole country, it's waker you get, not stronger.

The Government spies have plenty of time to work. A handful of determined men in the hills beyant holdin' out for a month'd rally the whole country."

With blanched cheeks and staring eyes—in which was an expression of fear mingled with amazement—Martin looked at the glowing face and listened to this sudden outburst of the brother of Maureen.

"D'you mean," said he, timidly—"are you talkin' of risin' in arms?"

"Why, what the divil else should I mane?" exclaimed Desmond, with an amused laugh. "D'you suppose I'd go out to face the English Tommies with a walkin'-stick? I don't think much of them," he added, thoughtfully, "but they've got rifles."

"I," said Martin, timidly—"I wouldn't be fit for that kind of work."

"I didn't think you would," returned Desmond, frankly. "An' I'd be sorry to ax you to tramp over the hills with a rifle under your arm. But I'm no good at writin', an' I have, even now, more writin' to do than I want. You might see your way to be my secretary. Anyhow, better come with me to-night an' hear what we have to say. If you don't like it, well an' good! Of course," tightening his grip of Martin's arm and lowering his voice, "you're an honest man an' can kape yir mouth shut. I wouldn't shoot you myself if you didn't, but there's them that would, because, you see, it's not child's play."

As they entered the main street the first familiar person they met was Sergeant Mulcahy, balancing himself on his heels, his thumbs in his belt, and looking fixedly at nothing.

"Hullo, Sergeant!" exclaimed Desmond; "goin' to be a wet evenin'?"

"How are you, Misther Desmond? Good evenin', Misther Harrington," replied the sergeant, politely; then, looking vaguely round the darkening horizon, "Ay, we may have a bit of weather before night-fall."

"Hard for the crops," suggested Desmond as they passed.

"Ay, troth," replied the sergeant, turning quietly away to pace in the opposite direction.

"There's a man, now," said Desmond to his companion, "too honest to be iver anything higher in the force than what he is. As for the R.I.C. in ginral"—Desmond's face darkened—"when them renegades fall into my hands they'll have a hot time!"

Silent, but marvelling at the strange language of his companion, Martin accompanied him as they steered their way through the diminishing lines of market carts, right through to the opposite end of the town.

The night fell very dark, though the moon showed at intervals through the cloud rifts, revealing for a few moments the lampless town where a few lights shone, here and there, in a cottage window or through the shutters of a shop. About midnight from the open door of the police barracks one constable after another stole quietly out, apparently making in different directions. Lastly came Sergeant Mulcahy, quicker of movement than in the daytime, but with face as inscrutable as ever. The dozen or so of constables who had gone in different directions reached the hill where Kelly's cabin stood amongst the firs, in such a manner

that as they began the ascent they formed a semicircle. They approached like men in an enemy's land, taking shelter when the moon gleamed, and creeping swiftly upward in the intervals of darkness. There was a light shining in Kelly's cabin—a wretched thatched hovel which had not possessed a permanent tenant for years. Despite the precautions of the police, they had not ascended far when the cry of the seagull broke the stillness of the quiet night, and was repeated higher and higher up until the light in the cabin went out.

At the same moment Sergeant Mulcahy blew shrilly on a whistle, and his men, abandoning all pretence at rendering themselves invisible, dashed with a cheer through bracken and brush. When they rushed the cabin it was empty. Sergeant Mulcahy, who had followed close behind, paused without to flash his bull's-eye around the bushes. For a moment he held it steady on a spot where, between the tangled branches of underwood, two terrified eyes stared from Martin Harrington's white face. Smiling grimly, the sergeant shut off his lantern, wheeled about and entered the cabin. Here his men were busy searching every nook; some standing on tiptoe poking their bayonets through the thatch. Nothing was found save a few loose papers, which, being handed to the sergeant, he stuck indifferently in his belt.

A few minutes later the men were formed up without. By the uncertain moonlight their faces expressed disgust and disappointment. As they stood to attention their eyes glared eagerly into the great darkness of the wood fringing the tip of the hill, whilst, far down in the valley they heard the cry of the seagull growing

fainter and fainter. Standing impassively in front of the line, Sergeant Mulcahy silently examined them; then, with brief command, ordered them to the right-about, and next moment they were scrambling down the hill on their way back to barracks.

CHAPTER XII

SCHOOLMASTER'S MUDDY BOOTS

MARTIN HARRINGTON was awakened next morning by the noise of hundreds of footsteps, confused conversation of the people on the road to Mass, and the clang of the chapel bell. He turned on the pillow and fell asleep again until he heard the grind of boots on the gravelled path, and knew that old Mrs. Moriarty had arrived to make his breakfast. When she tried the latch-key she exclaimed: "Glory be to God!" because she found the door unfastened. She stealthily pushed open the bedroom door a little, thrusting in her wrinkled face with fearsome glance towards the bed.

"Are you there, sir? Sure, thanks be to God! There y'are safe an' sound. I thought, maybe, when I found the door unfastened something had happened."

There was a dull pain at the back of his eyes. Groaning, he buried his face deep in the pillow; but Mrs. Moriarty, who had withdrawn her head, put it in again.

"Is it sick y'are, sir? Kin I git you anythin', achushla?"

"No, thanks, Mrs. Moriarty. I only want sleep."

"Troth, an' thanks be to God!" said Mrs. Moriarty, heartily. "It's Sunda' mornin', an' you kin slape till twilve o'clock Mass if you like. An sure, sir—afore you drop off—mind whin you go to the chapel, see the quare thing. Aw, the quarest thing I iver seen, though I was born an' bred in Carrickmachree. If I could see Father John I'd ax him what it manes bakase, you see, sir, he doesn't mind an ould cratur like me, an' he's always bin the kind, good praste to me in all me thrubbles. Are you spakin, sir?"

"No, Mrs. Moriarty. I only want rest."

"An' plase God ye'll have it?" observed Mrs. Moriarty, generously. "I won't make the laste taste of noise wid the pots an' pans, but just git you a nice cup of tay that'll do yir heart good, avic. But mind an' see the quare thing, sir, whin you go to Mass: the howly Vargin all kivered up wid a black cloth. The sorra wan of me knows what's the manin' of it at all, at all; an' all the people starin' and wonderin', as wise as meself. What did you say, sir?"

"Nothing. Tired!"

"Troth, thin, I won't say another word. Perhaps it's disthurbin' you I am wid me talk. But rest now, honey. Lay yir head in the cinthre of the pilla, achushla, an' thry an' slape, for it's tired an' white you look, God guard you!"

Sometime after she had closed the door he heard the subdued clink of the broom when it struck the wall, the kindling of the fire, and the singing of the kettle mingling with the great throng of feet on the road. All the time Mrs. Moriarty talked to herself about the wonderful thing. Martin Harrington dreamed that he

was arrested in Kelly's cabin, and was about to be hanged from the rafters, but was rescued by Mrs. Moriarty, whose whirling broom scattered the police, while her warcry was: "Are you aslape, sir?"

"Are you aslape, sir?"

He raised himself on his elbow.

"What is it, Mrs. Moriarty?"

"It's Sergeant Mulcahy, sir," explained Mrs. Moriarty, putting in her head and speaking in a loud, mysterious whisper. "Wants to spake wid you, sir!"

He was wide awake now, sitting up and staring at the nodding white night-cap of the old woman.

"Kin he see you, sir?"

He staggered to his feet, but sank back on the bed again.

"Let him come in, then."

Mrs. Moriarty's place was instantly taken by the compact figure of Sergeant Mulcahy dressed in his Sunday uniform, his prayer-book in hand. As he entered he put his hand to his cap.

"I'm afraid," said he, "I'm disturbin' you."

Of the two men the only one in fear was the schoolmaster, who sat on the side of the bed, holding on with both hands to the quilt. Taking the only chair beside the table, the sergeant quietly sat down, his back to the little diamond-paned window. Martin had muttered something about being delighted to see him.

"The fact is," explained the sergeant, apologetically, "I got a habit of droppin' in, specially on Sunday mornins' while off duty, to have a chat with my friend, Misther O'Mara, the schoolmaster before you came. But if I'm in the way I won't intrude."

He half rose, holding the back of the chair, and

looking towards the bed until Martin, having gasped a little, smiled, and motioned him to sit down.

"You're very welcome, Sergeant! Sit down. I've had a bad headache, an' want of sleep——"

Passing a hand over his aching brows, his words trailed into silence. He bent forward, holding his head in his hands.

Without betraying any sign of emotion the sergeant, having sat down again, laid his prayer-book on the table beside him, and adjusted his belt.

"I see you're not well, sir," said he, "an' I won't stay. You were too unwell to take off yir clothes, an' there's a power of mud on yir boots. A man never slapes so well whin he doesn't take off his clothes. Misther O'Mara, who was here before you—did you know him, sir?"

Waving his hand by way of weary negative, Martin, for the first time, discovered the mud on his boots.

"I'll tell you the kind of man he was," observed the sergeant, with increased energy of tone. "He was a sthrong, sensible man that had a will of his own. That's why he an' Father John couldn't agree. Father John has a powerful will of his own, an' wanted Misther O'Mara to understand that he was masther, an' Misther O'Mara the sarvint. For you know, sir, the schoolmasters in this country are only the sarvints of the prastes. Go agin the praste an' out you go! An' Misther O'Mara, who had more rale knowledge in his little finger than Father John had in his whole body, he couldn't stand it, an' he had to go. He an' me were great friends. He was a man that could talk on any subject. It was Misther O'Mara that first explained to me why it was there could never be a rebellion in this

country that could come to anything; because, you see, sir"—bending forward, the sergeant struck his right forefinger for emphasis into his left palm—"it's this way, sir. The Irish praste is a praste first an' an Irishman after, as they'll tell you. As long as the prastes are here, so long will England hould the country. You've read history, sir, an' you know the Roman sojers never tried to conquer this country because they knew what they'd get; but the Roman prastes conquered it, an' hould it tight. I'm afraid I'm worryin you, an' I'll go."

Rising, he took his prayer-book from the table.

"Them's Misther O'Mara's views," he added, gazing steadily at Martin's downcast face. "Playin' at rebellion's a dangerous game in this country, sir. An' it's not the British sojer or the Irish polis you'd have to fear, but the praste, that has more power than all the battheries of the British Empire."

Starting up, Martin grasped the end of the bed to steady himself.

"But, Sergeant," he exclaimed, "I'm not a rebel. I don't want——"

The sergeant gravely nodded.

"Of course, sir, I know that. I'm only tellin' you what Misther O'Mara an' me used to talk about. If I were you, sir, I'd take off them boots, an' get Mrs. Morlarty to wipe the mud off them, an' I'd get into bed right an' dacent, an' have a square slape if the ould chapel bell'll let you."

As the sergeant, speaking kindly, advanced with outstretched hand, which Martin rose to grasp, they heard a voice humming without; a shadow darkened the room, and they saw Desmond Malone's smiling face

pressed against the window. Next, they heard him cheerily blessing Mrs. Moriarty, and the old woman's quavering response; then the door opened, and Desmond strode in.

"God save all here!" he exclaimed, "includin' my good friend, Sergeant Mulcahy! The top of the mornin' to you, Sergeant? An' how's the schoolmaster?"

"I was just tellin' him," remarked the sergeant, stepping aside to give Desmond full view of the weak figure on the bedside, "that he ought to have a rousin' cup of tay an' get into bed. I don't belave the schoolmaster was rowlin' in the mud for sport, like an ass, but you've only to look at his boots an' the tear in his coat to see that he fell into a bog-hole last night."

Desmond, in his fresh Sunday clothes, gazed thunderstruck at the miserable aspect of Martin Harrington.

"Be all the goats in Gorey, Sergeant!" he exclaimed, "I do belave you've hit it! The schoolmaster was out countin' the stars, an' tumbled into a bog-hole. No breakfast yet? Be japers, that ould faggot outside wants rousin'." Striding to the door, he opened it, to roar: "I say, Mrs. Moriarty, if you don't bring the schoolmaster's tay in half a jiffey, I'll throw you over the roof. D'you hear?"

They heard Mrs. Moriarty breathlessly protest—

"Lard bless an' save us, Misther Dismond, them's terrible words——"

Closing the door, Desmond laughed as he turned to the others. "You're not going?" he exclaimed when the sergeant began to settle his tunic.

"Well, I am now," replied the sergeant, pulling his moustache straight. "I've had a very intherestin' talk with Misther Harrington, an' I'm sorry to lave. I was tellin' him about Misther O'Mara, an' what he thought on various subjects. Misther O'Mara was dead agin young men takin' up arms agin the Government because, as you know, Misther Dismond, the prastes put a stop to that with a heavy hand."

"The prastes?" exclaimed Desmond with an incredulous laugh.

"Don't they denounce all saycrit sissieties?" retorted the sergeant, sternly regarding him. "All Freemasins an' Faynians? Isn't that in all the Biship's pastorals? Now, Misther Dismond, ye'r an honest, dacent young man, an' I'm an ould man. You've bin trained to farm by the best farmer in the county, an' that's yir father. An' you'll have the revarsion of one of the finest farms in Ireland. Everything is bright an' smooth for you, an' yet——"

He suddenly stopped short.

"Go on!" said Desmond, defiantly, while Martin, clutching the bedclothes, drew in his breath.

The sergeant quietly settled his belt.

"An' yet," said he, "you purtend that you don't know the prastes are dead agin ribellion!"

"What's it to do with me?" returned Desmond, sitting down on the table, which creaked under him. "I'm no rebel."

"Of course not!" said the sergeant. "I'll say good-bye now, an' God bless you! I went up to see you at the Improvement Sissiety last night"—turning on his way to the door he looked fixedly at Desmond, who sat smiling with arms folded—"an' I brought some of

the young constables with me to be improved, but there was no meetin' after all."

"There was, Sergeant," said Desmond, good-humouredly; "but it was a very short one. Well to be sure! I'm sorry I didn't know you were goin' to pay us a visit. We'd bin glad to welcome you!"

Unbuttoning his tunic, the sergeant slowly drew forth a roll of foolscap.

"I found this on the floor of the cabin," he explained. "It appears to be a list of yir members. I thought you might like to have it back. Here it is an' it hasn't bin copied."

Rising, with a stunned expression, Desmond took the paper, and the sergeant, without another word, went out.

There was silence between the two young men for some time. Turning the papers over and over, Desmond saw that they were intact, folded them up and thrust them into his pocket. Then stared at Martin, who supported himself with a hand doubled on the bedclothes. They heard the sergeant discussing the mystery of the covered statue with Mrs. Moriarty; then his hard, methodical step on the gravel path.

"He knows all!" exclaimed Martin, excitedly.

Desmond, having seated himself on the table again, crossed his legs and folded his arms.

"He knows a lot," he admitted, more composedly. "But not all, achushla, not all. An' I'll tell you what he knows," he added, brightly. "He knows who's goin' to win, an' he's makin' friends with the side that's bound to win!"

"Is that," gasped Martin, "the way you look at it?"

"That's the way!" exclaimed Desmond. "There's no other way. I'm glad anyway you got back safe an' sound. Here's yir tay now. Come in, Mrs. Moriarty, ma'am, an' don't be shy. Here, give me the thray."

Taking the tea-tray from her trembling hands and placing it on the table he lifted the whole bodily to the bedside. "There now, Martin, my boy, take that cup an' then take off your clothes; tumble into bed an' slape if you can. You're to come over to the farm in the evenin'. Maureen says so. An' look here"—he was about to leave, when he came back, drawing the list of members from his pocket—"now that you're secretary you'd better take charge of this. Put it in a safe place."

Blushing at being summarily claimed as secretary to the Irish Republic, Martin took the list and placed it amongst some papers which were behind the looking-glass.

"I put it in my diary," he explained, turning to Desmond, who was watching with curiosity. "Like most people who have nothing to record, I keep a diary."

"But, is it a safe place?" asked the practical Desmond. "In case of fire, now, for instance?"

"An unlikely case," returned Martin, with a smile. "But I'll put diary an' all in a tin box. An' no one wants to read it. Mrs. Moriarty's the only one comes in here an' she can't read."

Desmond nodded and went out. As he was passing through the kitchen Mrs. Moriarty, who was bending forward thoughtfully on the low stool before the fire, looked up.

"Is that you, Misther Dismond, agra? Wor you at Mass this morning, sur?"

"Well, then, to tell the truth, I wasn't," replied Desmond from the outer doorway.

"There's the most wonderful thing!" exclaimed the old woman, arranging her nightcap as she stared at him. "The howly Vargin all kivered from head to foot, not as much as a finger to be seen!"

"Is that so?" observed Desmond. "Well, well, that's wonderful, intirely!"

"What it manes, sir, no wan kin make out. If I axed wan, I axed twinty, an sorra wan could say. But I did hear that Father John has a saycrit about it that will be mintioned from the althar nixt Sunda. It's t' be the most wonderful thing in the whole wide world!"

"It must be wonderful indade, Mrs. Moriarty. Well, God bless you! Good mornin'! Don't make a noise. The schoolmasther wants to slape."

"Indade, I'll be as quiet as a mouse. Good mornin', sir, an' God be with you!"

When Desmond went out on the high-road he found it crowded with excited persons discussing the wonderful mystery of the shrouded statue.

CHAPTER XIII

RESULT OF OVERSLEEPING

ABOUT five o'clock Martin set out for the Malone farmstead. He was met by a young man on horseback. In his modest fashion, the schoolmaster stepped aside towards the ditch, mildly replying to the other's salutation. Scarcely, however, had they passed when the stranger reined in the horse and, turning in the saddle, shouted "Hullo!"

Martin halted. The rider trotted back. He was about Martin's age, but tall, handsome, and powerful of frame. He bent down as he arrived.

"Are you Misther Harrington?" he asked.

"That is my name."

"Wait a minute," said the rider.

Vaulting lightly from the saddle, he patted the mare a moment on the neck, threw the reins over his arm, and walked in step with Martin as the latter turned to continue his way.

"Ye'r goin' to Misther Malone's, aren't you?" was the next question.

Replying that he was, Martin continued to walk quietly on.

"My name's O'Flaherty," observed the stranger, "an'

I've just come from there. You may have heard of me belike ? I'm coortin' Miss Maureen."

When Martin flushed at this, his excitement was duly noted by Mr. O'Flaherty.

"I have heard of you," remarked Martin.

"Me an' Jim O'Callaghan are the two survivors," explained O'Flaherty, "out of twinty of the best fightin' men in the county that set out to coort Maureen Malone. Jim an' me were schoolmates an' we bet the lot one after another in fair, upstand fight, like men, face to face. Jim an' me haven't bet one another yet. We have a go once a month in a raisonable way. An' we've heard about you, Misther Martin Harrington."

Although there was nothing offensive in the demeanour of Mr. O'Flaherty there was a suggestion of menace in his tone which struck harshly on the sensitive heart of the schoolmaster. Smacking his thigh with the riding whip, O'Flaherty glanced aside at his companion, who was plunged in painful silence.

"Me an' Jim," said he, "have talked you over an' we don't know quite how to take you. You see, you have as much right as any one else to enter the field, but, in that case, are you goin' to stan' up like the rest ?"

He patted the whip more impatiently against his powerful thigh, whilst Martin shrank, repelled by the proximity of such physical power.

"I don't quite know what you mean," said the schoolmaster.

"Ach, don't talk like that !" exclaimed O'Flaherty, disgusted. "Take a bit of advice, man, an' act straight ! You know damn well what I mane. Are you goin' to fight for Maureen or are you not ? You can take yir choice : ayther Jim or me."

Blushing like a girl, Martin glanced from his own thin hands to the brown, hair-covered hands of the young giant beside him.

"I'm no fighter," said he, "I never fought since I was a boy. I don't know how!"

"That's so much the worse for you," said O'Flaherty. An' yet, the p'int is this: ye'r such a poor, wake bit of a thing that I don't think ayther Jim or me'd have the heart to hurt you. An' yet, be ——, we don't mane to let you sneak in an' stale away Maureen."

"That, too," said Martin, "I could not do. I don't steal an' I'm no sneak."

At that moment, hearing some one laboriously whistling behind, they became mutually silent. It was Larry Magee in Sunday black coat, his hands in his pockets. As he passed he carelessly but respectfully bade them good-day. They returned his greeting, but took no further notice of him. He, however, having walked easily to the turn of the road, instantly, when out of their view, set at full speed for the farm.

Entering the front gate, he shouted—

"Miss Maureen! Are you there?"

And continued to shout until Maureen came running out.

"Miss Maureen," exclaimed Larry, "If you don't hurry, there'll be murder done!"

"Murder, Larry? What do you mane?"

Taking off his cap, Larry vigorously scrubbed his hot forehead with it.

"Sure, I passed them on the road just above the turnin'," he explained. "Misther O'Flaherty an' the schoolmaster, an' sure it was a terror to see Misther

O'Flaherty's face, miss. If you don't hurry he'll ate the schoolmaster in a couple of bites!"

Maureen waited to hear no more. She threw the book which she had been reading behind her into the hall and, as she raced towards the gate, hastily undid her apron, rolling it up while she ran. When she reached the turn of the road she saw O'Flaherty poising his whip, whilst Martin stood near, his hands clenched. As she screamed they turned and saw her. In another moment O'Flaherty pulled his horse round, jumped into the saddle, and galloped away furiously.

Running up, Maureen caught Martin by the arm and gazed breathlessly into his white face.

"Did he strike you?" she gasped.

The schoolmaster, smiling feebly, shook his head.

"He would in a minute!" exclaimed Maureen. "He's a terrible temper. He'd kill you almost before he'd look at you. Thank Heaven, I was in time!"

Reining in on top of the hill, half a mile distant and standing up in the stirrups, O'Flaherty saw Maureen with her arm through the schoolmaster's. He watched them enter the farm gates; then, his handsome face flushed in rage, he struck the mare with the heavy crop and galloped off.

Next morning, having slept overnight at the farm, Martin Harrington wakened to the crowing of cocks, deep voices in the yard, and the rumbling of carts. Taking his watch from under the lavender-scented pillow, he saw that it was fifteen minutes past seven. As school began at ten it was not necessary to rise yet. The sunlight threw a fine shadowgraph of the parted curtains with a round looking-glass between them, just above his head on the wall. He tried to calculate

how long it took until the shadowed rim of the looking-glass touched the top of a leaf on the flower-patterned wallpaper. He thought that when the rim was three inches over the leaf it would be time to rise, and he lay quiet, watching the creeping shadow.

"Misther Harrington!"

The calling of his name mingled with the laughter of the school children in the distance. He woke for the second time and found that it was within a few minutes of half-past eleven.

Having dressed with feverish rapidity, he rushed downstairs and flung open the front door. With hat swinging by the strings in her hand, her hair tossed, Maureen came running through the gateway, behind her a crowd of hatless children, mostly in pinafores, screaming and breathless.

"Such a race!" exclaimed Maureen. "I've given them a half-holiday! We've raced for apples. Who's first?"

Several claimants ran right against her. She swung them aside, calling out their names.

"Bridget Hoolihan, first, five apples. Nellie O'Hagan, second, four. Jackie Costello—— Oh, but look at them, the pet lambs!"

Swiftly parting the throng, she lifted one very small child in her arms and held another by the hand.

"Iv'ry one first prize!" she cried. "That's the best way to settle it. Come, Misther Harrington, an' help us to shake down the apples."

"He won't!" exclaimed a stern voice.

Father John, who had come up through the hall, now stepped out into the front.

"He will not!" repeated Father John, angril

"Ye'v done enough harm to-day, Miss Maureen. I've an account to settle now wid Misther Harrington. Come here, sir."

Putting down the child, Maureen caught Martin by the arm.

"Don't go!" said she. "Father John, I want him to get the apples."

Getting redder in the face, Father John stamped his blackthorn on the path.

"That'll do now," said he. "If you don't want to blast this young man's career——"

"I'd better go, Miss Malone," murmured Martin.

"Perhaps you had," assented Maureen, frightened at the prospect of blasting his career and conscious of the impatience of twenty odd children.

As she disappeared in a cloud of pinafores, Martin subduedly followed Father John, who stumped angrily on to the high-road.

"Come on now," said he as Martin lagged. "Walk beside me now. This is a fine beginnin' for you, young man. Be the grace of God, I dhropped in to the school this mornin' an' what did I find? A chit of a girl turnin' the place into a Bedlam. Ring-a-ring-a-rosy an' Blindman's Buff an' hunt-the-slipper inst'd of figures an' tasks. What's the manin' of it? I ax you now, as yir manager, what's the manin' of it? Am I to dismiss you at wanst?"

"I was ill, sir," explained Martin, submissively. "Mister Malone kindly insisted on me stayin' the night, an' this morning I overslept myself."

"An' you diligate yir jooties to Miss Malone," exclaimed Father John, scornfully. "A nice schoolmasther she makes! Aren't you long enough in

Carrickmacree to know that the sight of Maureen Malone is enough to turn the childher clane off their heads? I'm not satisfied wid you at all. Ye're not going on right at all. What d'you mane by it? D'you want me to write yir dismissal?"

To this Martin made no reply, but hung his head. They had arrived at the cross-roads, where Father John halted.

"There," said he, pointing with the stick—"there's the road down to the school. I'm goin' into the town meself as it's market-day, but ye'll go now an' prepare school for to-morra. Nothin' kin be done to-day now Maureen's taken the scholars among the apple-threes. I'll have to think over this matther an' see what I'll do. I'm not plazed with you, Misther Harrington. There's another thing. Since you kem here, an' it's now five weeks, ye'v niver bin wanst to Mass. How's that?"

The schoolmaster's face grew a shade paler. His head was bent, but, at length, raising his eyes, he silently searched the red, angry face before him.

"Have you nothin' to say!" exclaimed Father John, striking his stick on the ground. "Am I in front of a heretic or an Atheist as well as a schoolmasther that neglicts his jooties? Look to yirself, young man. I'll have a talk wid you very soon. Go on now an' do as I bid you."

Slowly turning, Martin walked away without a word. Father John looked after him for a few minutes, then, settling his soft clerical hat more firmly, started sturdily towards the town.

CHAPTER XIV

BAR-PARLOUR GOSSIP

THE forms aside the long deal table in the partitioned space known as Delahunt's Bar Parlour were crowded with men and women from outlying districts, awe-stricken at the conversation of the local gossips, Mrs. Doran and Mrs. Moriarty. At the end of the table, her hands in her lap, sat Mrs. Delahunt, a far-away look in her cold, blue eyes.

"An' it was thin," said Mrs. Doran, Father John's housekeeper, "that his riverence kem t'me, an' sis he, 'Kin you stitch, Mrs. Doran?' sis he, an' sis I, 'Is it stitch, yir riverence?' sis I, 'Sure, haven't I bin stitchin',' sis I, 'since I was the height of a bee's knee?' sis I, 'whin I was taught to stitch,' sis I, 'be the good nuns,' sis I, 'at Saint Bridjit's Nashnil School,' sis I. For, as you know, Mrs. Moriarty, ma'am, I was edukeeted be the good nuns of Saint Mary's down in Ballyhroffey."

"Indade, you needn't tell me that!" said Mrs. Moriarty, who, like her friend, had a large pot of porter before her. "All the world knows that, Mrs. Doran, ma'am."

With an affectation of modesty Mrs. Doran took a sip and settled her plaid shawl.

"Well, as I was a sayin', Mrs. Moriarty," she continued, "Father John, sis he, 'Well, I want you,' sis he, 'to do some good stitchin',' sis he; 'I want you to stitch up the howly Vargin,' sis he, 'in the chapel,' sis he, 'This very night,' sis he."

She paused to enjoy the astounding effect of this revelation, while Mrs. Moriarty gazed with open admiration at the woman whom she called friend. Meanwhile, Mr. Delahunt, himself, who had been standing with his back turned in the doorway, faced about. On pretence of wiping the stains on the table with his duster, he made his way gradually to his wife.

"My dear," he whispered, bending close to her, "I think I hear the babby cryin' upstairs."

Mrs. Delahunt made no sign of being conscious of his presence. She turned her pale eyes steadily in the direction of Mrs. Doran. Having waited behind her, studying the back of her thin brown hair, Mr. Delahunt smothered a sigh by stuffing the duster against his mouth then—with a sudden air of alarm—as if some customer wanted attendance—he plunged into the shop without.

"This very night, ma'am?" repeated Mrs. Moriarty, thus gently urging her revered friend to continue the thrilling narrative.

Starting, as if from reverie, Mrs. Doran looked round with surprise, apparently astonished to find herself the centre of a double row of listeners.

"This very night, ma'am?" suggested Mrs. Moriarty, still more gently.

"The very words he used," began Mrs. Doran, whilst the people, glad to find her willing to impart further information, bent forward more eagerly. "An' I sis, sis I, 'Father John,' sis I, 'I've bin yir housekaper,' sis I, 'for fourteen year,' sis I——"

"That's thrue enough!" exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty, looking round with triumph. "For I remimber the day she kem. All the world knows it, Mrs. Doran, ma'am, an' a rale good housekaper ye'v bin."

"'I've bin housekaper for you now, Father John,' sis I, repeated Mrs. Doran, 'for fourteen year,' sis I, 'an' did I iver refuse to do what you axed me?' sis I, 'whither it was by night or day?' sis I. 'No,' sis his riverence, 'you niver did,' sis he. 'An' that's why I kem to you,' sis he, 'bekase,' sis he, 'I kin thrust you, Mrs. Doran,' sis he, 'whin I kin thrust no wan else,' sis he; 'for this business,' sis he, 'is a sacred wan,' sis he, 'an' not to be done be ivry wan,' sis he, 'or to be talked about,' sis he. And sis I, 'I'll git me nadle an' thread,' sis I, 'an' be with you in half a minute,' sis I, 'an' sis Father John, sis he, 'God bless you,' sis he; 'God bless you, Mrs. Doran,' sis he."

"Amen!" exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty, exultingly striking her pot on the table.

"Amen!" chorussed the people with deep reverence.

There was a pause of silent suspense. The men slowly smoked their short clay pipes. The women, with sympathetic eyes, watched Mrs. Doran, who was evidently preparing for emotional development: Indeed, her next words were spoken in lower tone and trembling accent.

"Whin we kem to the howly place, sis he, 'Mrs. Doran,' sis he, 'this is a sacred business,' sis he, 'I

anoint you with the howly wather,' sis he." All present crossed themselves. "'I anoint yir nadle an' I anoint yir thread,' sis he. 'Be raison if the task I give you,' sis he, 'yir name, Mrs. Doran,' sis he, ''ull go down to histry,' sis he, 'wid the names of the two sainted faymales,' sis he, 'who have seen a miracle,' sis he, 'where we now stan,' sis he. An' though I shouldn't say it, Mrs. Moriarty, ma'am, perhaps there's wan of thim saints listenin' t' me at the prisent momint!"

There was a general movement of amazement. All eyes followed those of Mrs. Doran, which rested on the cold face of Mrs. Delahunt.

Mr. Delahunt, who had left the door of the bar parlour slightly open, had been hovering about helping his daughter to attend customers, but sometimes slipping from behind the counter to listen to Mrs. Doran's recital. At this moment he entered, wiped the table a little and again approached his wife.

"My dear," said he, agitatedly; "would you mind goin' upstairs an' seein' what's wrong with the babby? He's cryin' his heart out."

For the moment Mrs. Delahunt paid no attention; but, as he bent anxiously towards her, she turned and looked fixedly at him. He remained, apparently hypnotised, until released by the sound of a familiar voice without.

"There's Father John!" exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty.

Rushing away, Mr. Delahunt almost ran into Father John's arms.

"Sure, Father John, but ye'r welkim!" he exclaimed, loudly. "What kin I do for you?"

Standing rocklike in the middle of the floor, his

underlip protruded, Father John gazed sternly at the cringing little man.

"You kin do nothin' for me, Misther Delahunt," said he. "I kem to see yir wife."

"Kin I deliver yir message, yir riverence?" asked Mr. Delahunt, rubbing the duster into a ball between his nervous hands.

"I have a message for her," observed Father John. "But I won't deliver it through you, Misther Delahunt!"

As the little shopkeeper backed hurriedly out of the way, Father John, walking firmly to the foot of the stairs, cleared his throat, and shouted—

"Mrs. Delahunt, are you there?"

The door of the bar parlour instantly opened. Gliding out, Mrs. Delahunt stood beside him, her thin white face having two bright patches of red under the eyes.

"I'm here, Father John!"

He turned.

"Och, there y' are, Mrs. Delahunt! I want you to kim up t' me at seven o'clock this evenin' unless ye'r better engaged."

"Seven to the minute," replied Mrs. Delahunt, with a triumphant glance towards her husband, who had shrunk into the darkest corner behind the counter. "Always at yir sarvice, Father John!"

As she bowed her head he placed a thick hand on it.

"Bless you!" said he, solemnly. "Ye'v the rale thrue spirit."

Stepping to the bar-parlour he opened the door. The people, without exception, instantly rose and remained

standing, while Father John frowned heavily to focus his eyes.

"Is that you I see there, Mrs. Doran, thryin' to hide behind big Pat Doherty of Ballyragget?" said he. "What are you doin' here with a can of dirty black porter in front of you?"

"Plaise, yir riverence," quavered Mrs. Doran, "I met a few ould friends an' was havin' a bit of an innocent talk."

"I'll be bound yir long tongue wagged fast enough," said Father John. "Home with you now ow' a' this, an' git the dinner ready. Away wid you!"

Closing the door, he faced towards the front, and found Mrs. Delahunt beside him.

"At siven, remember!" said he.

"At siven, yir riverence!" said Mrs. Delahunt, eagerly following him to the door.

The customers from shop and bar parlour had crowded out to look at him, the men raising their hats, the women curtseying low. When he had passed out into the street Mrs. Delahunt glided back, rubbing her hands fiercely together, and received the adulation of those who had resumed their seats about the long table.

Soon after the street entrance was darkened by the huge figure of Mr. Malone, who, as he entered, looked cheerfully about.

"God save all here!" he exclaimed, in his deep tones. "Where is the man of the house?"

Shuffling from behind the counter, Mr. Delahunt raised his weary face.

"I'm glad to see you, Misther Malone!" said he, dejectedly.

"An' I'm glad to see you, Misther Delahunt. Lay it there!" Extending a great hand he grasped the thin fingers of the little shopkeeper. "I hope business is thrivin'? I see ye'v got yir cliver daughter there. The top of the mornin' t' you, Kathleen! That's right. Give that dacent ould woman a parcel of the best tay. An' how's yir good wife, Misther Delahunt?"

Mr. Delahunt made no reply, but he jerked his thumb towards a far corner of the shop where there was a high desk beside the window.

"Come over here," said he in a low voice. "I want to spake to you."

"Sartinly," assented Mr. Malone, his voice modified in deference to the mysterious manner of his friend.

Leading the way in to the little office, Mr. Delahunt closed the door so that behind the partition they were secure from listeners. He caught the lappet of the farmer's thick frieze coat between his thumb and forefinger.

"Father John's just bin here," he explained hurriedly, "an' wants Mrs. Delahunt at siven in the evenin'. She hasn't done a sthroke of work this day, market-day an' all, but she's bin listenin' to them ould gossips with their talk about the coverin' up of the Vargin an' the like, an' I'm afeard she won't do a han's turn. There's no betther business woman goin' whin she's not disthurbed in her mind be Rethrates an' the like, but if she'd given a hand in the shop we'd have bin the better of it be a couple of pounds an' maybe more."

Leaning his elbow on the desk, he rested his weary face on his hand, while his right hand dropped to his

side. With manful sympathy Mr. Malone gazed down upon him.

"This is bad news," observed the farmer. "I don't mind a woman attindin' her religious duties an' her praste in raison, but there's a limit to iv'rything. Mind, I've nô objection to anythin' in raison," he repeated, with uplifted forefinger. "As long's ye'v women ye'll have prastes, an' I suppose that's right enough. But whin it comes to losin' money in the way of business, that's what I call oversteppin' the mark. By the same token, me friend, how's the little chap?"

At that question Mr. Delahunt, becoming excited, looked cautiously around. Having stood up on the stool to stare over the partition, when he got down again he carefully raised the lid of the desk and drew forth a feeding-bottle.

"Come over here to the winda," he whispered. "Take that in yir hand. Mind you don't drop it! I ran upstairs a while ago to get it, an' I must put it back at wanst. Look at it now, Misther Malone, an' ye'r a family man yirself."

Having first laid his stick solemnly on the desk, Mr. Malone took the feeding-bottle tenderly in both hands, heaved up his shoulders and holding it up to the light looked at it through one eye critically for some moments. Before offering an opinion he uncorked the bottle and smelt the contents.

"By the powers of Moll Kelly," said he in a low whisper as he handed it back, "it sames quare wake stuff. There's more nor mother's milk in it, I'm thinkin'. What is it, at all? Barley wather?"

"I'm afeard, replied Mr. Delahunt, carefully placing the bottle in his side pocket, "there's a sthrong trace

of howly wather in it. Misther Malone, it's cruel hard, havin' waited all these years for a boy, to have him rared from the cradle for the Church whin I've bin lookin' to place him in the business!"

Gravely taking up his stick, Mr. Malone tucked it under his arm and laid a kindly hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Misther Delahunt," said he, "if I wor you I'd take a firm stand in this matter. I intend to have a square talk with Mrs. Malone meself, but that's nayther here nor there. As soon as Mrs. Delahunt goes upstairs to the babby I'd lock the door an' let her stay there. Her natheral place is beside the cradle. Are you man enough to take them strong misures?"

Mr. Delahunt, whose head was bent, looked up with timid glance and trembled.

"D'you think I ought?" he asked.

"Sartinly! Tell me now: siven o'clock, you say? I'll drop round at that hour an' help you to stick to yir guns!"

"God bless you for that!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt, seizing the strong hand. "I'll do it. An' I'll be on the watch for you at siven."

"I won't desave you!" said Mr. Malone, warmly shaking hands. "Run up now an' put the bottle into the gossoon's cradle, for whatever's in it, the little man must have something to drink anyhow. Goodbye now for the prisent, an' be a man!"

He went out, merely pausing in the shop for a friendly word with Kathleen, whilst Mr. Delahunt stole upstairs to replace the feeding-bottle.

CHAPTER XV

SOMETHING IN THE WIND

SEVEN o'clock came. Along the uneven street a few laggard carts rumbled hôмeward. The shutters were up on Mr. Delahunt's shop, but a lamp burned within, where Mr. Delahunt himself was at his desk. The front door stood ajar. Faithful to his promise, Mr. Malone arrived, and Mr. Delahunt came on tiptoe to meet him.

"Well?" said the farmer, gazing down at him.

"I did it!" whispered Mr. Delahunt. "I sent all the girls out for some fresh air, an' I locked her up!"

"An' how's she took it?"

Mr. Delahunt threw a frightened glance towards the darkened staircase. There was a moment's silence, during which he took the quill pen from behind his ear and put it to his lips.

"It's quare enough," said he, in a quavering whisper. "But she thumped the door wanst or twice, an' thin there hasn't bin a sound since! Maybe," he suggested more cheerfully, "she's aslape?"

"I'm not aslape!" screamed Mrs. Delahunt, bursting in from the street. "You thought to kape me

from my praste, but you couldn't do it! Ruin an' desolation'll folly you for the way ye'r' goin' on!"

They saw by the faint yellow beam of the lamp that she was fully dressed, wearing her bonnet, and feverishly buttoning the top part of her cloak as she spoke. She vanished as quickly as she had entered, and they heard the rapid tap of her heels past the shuttered windows.

"How did she do it?" gasped Mr. Malone at length.

Mr. Delahunt, who had seized himself by the brows, remaining deep in thought, abruptly hurried out of the front door and disappeared through a side gate into the back yard. Here Mr. Malone found him, pointing silently at a ladder, the top of which rested against the window sill of his wife's bedroom. They stood open-mouthed, staring up.

"Well, glory be to God!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, "the divil's in the women. This bates Banagher!"

Turning suddenly, Mr. Delahunt grasped his companion by the arm.

"Was the child with her?" he asked eagerly. "Did you notice if she had the child?"

Scratching his cheek, Mr. Malone looked down at the flagged ground, then up at the window again, and finally at the anxious face beside him.

"Well, now, that's a hard question," he returned. "Sorra one of me knows. It was too dark to see anythin' rightly, an' she kem in and went like a shadda. Supposin' now we go up to the room an' see if the little chap's left alone? Isn't that a fine iday?"

Without delay Mr. Delahunt darted from the yard. Mr. Malone, following, paused at the gateway to stare back at the ladder, shaking his head with pursed lips.

He found Mr. Delahunt waiting for him in the shop, where the smell of stale groceries and porter mingled with that of the big paraffin lamp tied to a hook in the centre of the smoked ceiling. In this dim light the big farmer carefully picked his steps.

"This way," explained Mr. Delahunt in a hoarse whisper. "Take care of the barrel. Here's the stairs."

"Never mind me, me friend," observed Mr. Malone, generously. "Sure it's not the first time I wint up yir stairs."

Mr. Delahunt led the way up the narrow, uncarpeted steps, which creaked under their feet, while the strong grip of Mr. Malone almost cracked the weak bannister. At the bedroom door there was some delay, Mr. Delahunt being too nervous to adjust the key. When, after several attempts, he opened the door they went in on tiptoe. The room was dark. Striking a match, Mr. Delahunt lit the stump of a candle which he found on the window-sill, and they saw the little chubby boy lying fast asleep in the cradle. Holding the candle aloft, Mr. Delahunt gazed wistfully down, Mr. Malone looking over his shoulder.

"A fine, healthy little chap, God bless him!" said the latter in a whisper. "Betther come away now an' let him slape."

As Mr. Delahunt stooped, and Mr. Malone held the candle over him, the baby woke with a piercing yell. Almost at the same moment both men rushed out, never halting until they stood panting and holding on to each other at the foot of the stairs. The cries of the child growing more piteous, Mr. Delahunt sat down on the barrel, his white face looking ghastly in the

light of the candle which Mr. Malone still firmly held.

"He'll burst himself!" groaned Mr. Delahunt.

"He will!" exclaimed Mr. Malone. "Glory be to God, there's a screech. Whoiver'd think he had lungs like that! Wait a minute. He's gettin' tired. No! Be japers, he's at it agin. There's a fearful one! What d' you mane to do, in the name of God? It's at a time like this we feel the want of the women, though we're always talkin' bad of them behind their backs. The saints presarve us, the gossoon'll burst himself into smithereens!"

Not until the arrival of Kathleen were they relieved, and to her they confided the care both of baby and candle, silently marvelling at the cool manner in which she undertook the task. Having waited until she had gone upstairs, when the baby seemed to become miraculously quiet, they went out into the cool night air. Until half way to the farm they plodded on side by side without speaking.

"Ye'r in low sperrits," observed Mr. Malone at length, "an' that's nayther good for man or baste. Thry an' cheer up a bit, me friend!"

Raising his hat, Mr. Delahunt drew his sleeve across his damp brow.

"Aisy said, aisy said," he groaned. "But I've a power of thrubble on me mind. If things go on as they bin goin' there'll be nothin' for it but to put up the shutters an' go off to Amerikay."

"Plase God, ye'r far from that yit!" said Mr Malone, cheerfully. "Don't mate the divil half-way I'll tell you what now. Maybe it's presoomin' of me to give you a bit of advice. But I know ye'll take no

offince. An' this is what I say—take care of the ditch there; there's some ould treacherous holes in it—I say, put down yir foot an' tell yir good wife she's gone far enough. Mind you," he added, placing a hand on his friend's stooped shoulder, "I'm not one for meddlin' too much wid a woman an' her religious duties. I like to see them go to confession, for it kapes them straight, an' saves a married man a power of worry an' trouble. But some women go too far. If I wor you I'd say, 'Now, me fine girl, ye'v bin runnin' out of yir home at the biddin' of Father John often enough. Can't you stay at home for wanst?' I hope, Misther Delahunt, I'm not givin' offince?"

"None the laste in the world," replied Mr. Delahunt, grasping the proffered hand. "But I'm afeared it's not so aisy to reggilate a woman whin her mind's made up."

"Aisy enough, aisy enough," said Mr. Malone, "if you're a bit firm. You must take a firm stand from the first, an' it'll all come aisy afther. Women like to be masthered. It's their nathur. They don't care for a man that's not firm. But here we are, thanks be to God, an' we'll go in an' have somethin' warm to ate an' drink."

Having arrived at the farmhouse, Mr. Malone, first depositing Mr. Delahunt in the big leathern armchair, went cheerfully to the kitchen to order supper. When he returned he found Mr. Delahunt cuddled up, his elbows on his knees, his head between his hands.

"Be the powers of Moll Kelly!" exclaimed Mr. Malone. "There's nothin' for you, I see, but a stiff glass of whiskey."

Whilst he was getting glasses Mrs. Malone came in.

Mr. Malone, who had been bending over the table, pouring a liberal supply of whiskey into his guest's tumbler, straightened himself.

"There she is!" he exclaimed. "Come here, me darlint, till I intherduce you to an ould friend of mine."

Mrs. Malone came brightly round the table, and Mr. Delahunt stood up to shake hands.

"Look at her!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, putting a hand on her shoulder. "Isn't she a rale thrate to look at? The brown eyes of her, an' the roses in her cheeks, an' not a grey hair in the black head of her! Achushla machree, but ye'r' lovelier an' lovelier iv'ry time I look at you. Give's a kiss!"

Mrs. Malone smacked his face with the back of her hand.

"Arra, get along with you!" said she. "Goin' on like a big boy foreninst strangers!"

"Maybe I've a bit of the boy left in me yit," said Mr. Malone, ruefully rubbing his cheek. "But, sure, you worn't always so shy with yir kisses, Honor. Many's the time you wor glad enough to have one, ay, an' twinty, one after another, as fast as they'd come! D'you mind the time when——"

"Arra, whisht, an' don't be makin' an omadhaun of yourself!" said Mrs. Malone, blushing as she turned from him. "Mister Delahunt, isn't he a quare man to be goin' on like this at his time of life? Dinnis, go an' sit down, an' don't be makin' a fool of yourself."

Stealing his arm round her shoulder, Mr. Malone suddenly kissed her with explosive violence. Then he laughed heartily, as, lifting his glass, he winked over it at Mr. Delahunt.

"In troth, ma'am," said Mr. Delahunt gallantly, "he's the man to be invied, an' that's the truth."

"There's a time for everything," observed Mrs. Malone. "An' how's Mrs. Delahunt?"

Nursing the tumbler on his knees, Mr. Delahunt looked into the coloured paper in the grate and gravely shook his head.

"She's fairly well, I thank you, ma'am," said he.

Then he sighed as he lifted the glass to his lips. Mr. Malone, having seated himself at the table, sat back and looked steadily at his wife.

"I'll tell you now, Honor," said he, "betwixt you an' me an' Misther Delahunt there, Mrs. Delahunt has turned mighty religious, an' Misther Delahunt here thinks it's gone far enough. Who's that? Come in, whoever y' are, in the name of God."

It was Jackeen who, having softly opened the door, peeped into the room. As his father's eyes met his, he shrank back at first, but came in, fearfully, a pace or two.

"Look at him!" said Mr. Malone, shaking his head. "Arra, look at him! Sure, yir mother'll niver make a dacent, fat praste out of you. Why don't you put some flesh on him, Honor? Sure, Jackeen, the women'll niver care a thraneen for you, if ye'r all skin' an bone."

"Arra, Dinnis, can't you let the child alone?" protested Mrs. Malone. "He's what God made him. Come here, darlint, an' don't mind him."

With one eye on his father, Jackeen stole round the table until he stood close beside his mother.

"Sure, Honor," said Mr. Malone, smiling, "you niver could take a joke somehow. Here, me boy, I don't mane to vex you, here's a shillin' for you."

Stretching out his leg to thrust a great hand into his pocket, Mr. Malone tossed a shilling over the table.

"Sure, I don't understand them kind o' jokes," said Mrs. Malone. "An' indade, Dinnis, I don't understand making a scoff an' mock of religion. There's higher things nor thinkin' o' what you can ate an' drink, an' it's when we come to our deathbed that them things come home to us. Isn't that so, Misther Delahunt?"

Startled at being so abruptly addressed, Mr. Delahunt looked confusedly at her.

"There's a lot in what you say, ma'am," he muttered.

"It's true enough," said Mrs. Malone, "an' take my advice, an' don't be too ready to interfere with Mrs. Delahunt, for you may be doin' your immortal sowl an injury you could niver repair."

"Bedad, that's a great sarmin!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, striking the table. "I'm thinkin' it's you, Honor, should go into the Church, an' not Jackeen there. What is it, Jackeen? What are you pullin' yir mother's skirts for? Spake out, like a man!"

"Mother," whispered Jackeen, standing on tiptoe to reach her ear, "it's time to go to Father John's."

"Yes, it is time, avic," assented his mother, "so get your hat an' come along. Mister Delahunt, I hope you'll excuse me. Misther Malone'll kape you compiny an' I'll send up a bit of supper."

Shaking hands with Mr. Delahunt, she prepared to go, Jackeen holding on to her dress and keeping on the far side.

"Why, Honor," asked Mr. Malone, turning firmly in his seat, "where is it ye'd be goin' to?"

"Father John wants to see me," exclaimed Mrs. Malone, with an air of surprise at the question.

A blush spread all over the farmer's clean-shaved face as he stood up to look after her while she passed round the table towards the door, Jackeen still hiding beside her.

"Sure, it sthrikes me," exclaimed Mr. Malone, "that this is becomin' an iviryday habit with you, goin' to see Father John!"

She paused to look back reproachfully, her hand on the door. "Sure, there you go agin, Dinnis," said she; "tryin' to throw cowld water on the good ould parish praste that has no more harm in him than the child unborn. Is that right or fair, Mister Delahunt?"

Starting again, Mr. Delahunt, twisting himself in the chair, glanced hastily from husband to wife, as he made some incoherent statement.

"There now, Dinnis," said Mrs. Malone, with gentle reproof, "you see Misther Delahunt agrees with me. Come, Jackeen, achushla."

Mr. Malone opened his mouth as if to speak, but she was gone. He sat down and, with his mouth still open, stared hard at nothing. Presently he began to scratch the back of his head.

"There's somethin' in the wind," suggested Mr. Delahunt, in a subdued voice.

Slowly turning his face Mr. Malone stared heavily at Mr. Delahunt's bent figure almost lost in the depths of the big armchair. "I hope supper'll soon come," he observed, gazing towards the open door. Then, after a pause, he bent forward: "Look here," he explained, "it's this way. It's not altogether, you see, like Mrs. Delahunt, for Mrs. Malone, you see, she owns the bist

part of the farm in her own right, d'you see, an' she's indepindent like, d'you mind, an' of coorse it wouldn't do for me to up an' make a prisoner of her in what's her own house, d'you see; I hope supper'll soon come!"

"Ay, ay," said Mr. Delahunt, kindly, "of coorse she kin stan on her own feet."

"That's it!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, striking the table, an expression of relief on his dazed face. "There it is, you see, an' ye'r right, too. I only had what you might call a bit of land whin I married her, an', of coorse, I'd niver be the man I am only for the land she brought. An' it's in her own right, you mind, for, you see, it's like this"—he bent forward laboriously again to explain, tapping his right forefinger against his left palm—"I niver axed her to make over the land to me, an' I wouldn't! for it's hers in her own right an' she kin do as she pleases with it. An' that," he said, sitting back and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand—"that's the way it stands."

He said no more, but lapsed into a strange silence, whilst Mr. Delahunt, having lit his pipe, bent forward to send long lines of smoke up the chimney. Supper arrived, and during its discussion Mr. Malone spoke absently about the coming harvest and the emigration problem. At last Mr. Delahunt rose to go. Mr. Malone went with him along the road. At the cross-roads they paused.

"What's goin' on, at all, at all, up at the chapel?" exclaimed Mr. Malone, placing a hand on his companion's shoulder. "Look up beyant."

Though the night was darksome, they could distinguish figures near the chapel on the hill, following a

bobbing lantern. Presently, all was dark. Almost immediately after the windows of the chapel seemed lit up. The two men stood gazing silently at this until the light went out again.

"Is it midnight mass or a burnt sacrifice, or what?" asked Mr. Malone in a vague whisper.

Mr. Delahunt groaned.

"Somethin' quare," he replied. "The lord presarve us!

"Amin!" assented Mr. Malone, in a subdued voice, as he shook hands.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CHICKEN'S LEG

MRS. MORIARTY, who had been cleaning things up in the schoolmaster's house, was resting before the fire on a stool, a tray full of unwashed delft beside her on the tiled floor, when the front door was opened and Maureen came in with a basket on her arm.

"God save you, Mrs. Moriarty! Is Misther Harrington in?"

She glanced as she spoke at the half-open bedroom door. Wheeling round on the stool, both hands claw-like on her knees, Mrs. Moriarty nodded her frilled, white nightcap.

"Troth, thin, he's not, Miss Maureen, mavourneen. He was failin' poorly, God help him, an' he thought he'd like the taste of a walk. Ye'v got somethin' nice there in the basket, be the swate smell of it."

Maureen blushed as she went to the table under the small diamond-paned window, where she deposited the basket, lifting from the top a spreading bunch of freshly-cut flowers."

"There's nothin' at all," said she, "only a couple of

chickens an' a little fruit. Can I have somethin' to put these flowers in ?"

"Troth an' you can, Miss Maureen. Wait a minute. Me ould legs aren't as young as they used to be."

Painfully rising, the little old woman rubbed her thighs as she groaned, whilst Maureen, with the flowers against her lips, watched her over the blossoms.

"Sure, I can get it meself !" said Maureen, quickly, "if you tell me where you kape the things."

"There's a bit o' a cupboard here," observed Mrs. Moriarty, toiling across to the wall beside the fireplace. "I'll git you a mug, honey, if ye'll give me time."

"An' so he's not well !" exclaimed Maureen, disconsolately. "Are you sure his bed's aired, Mrs. Moriarty ? I've noticed him lookin' dreadful pale this while back. I was thinking, maybe, the blankets might be damp."

Mrs. Moriarty glanced back over her shoulder from the cupboard.

"Musha, God love you," said the old woman, "d'you think I've bin mindin' schoolmasther's house all these years to have damp clothes on the bed ! Here, alanna, could you raich up to that mug there on the top shelf ? Me arm's that bad wid the rheumatiz I kin hardly lift it to me head."

Hastening across, Maureen stretched above the nightcap and secured a cracked mug, into which she stuck the flowers, placing them in the centre of the window-sill. She stepped back to gaze dubiously at the effect.

"I hope he'll like them," she remarked. "He's fond of flowers an' I got the best anyhow. An' you'll have the chicken for his supper, won't you, Mrs. Moriarty ?

I'm afeard he doesn't ate enough. Did he like the fresh eggs I sent for his breakfast?"

The glimmer of a blush faintly coloured the small, furrowed face in the frilled nightcap.

"Troth, he only had wan this mornin'," replied Mrs. Moriarty, returning slowly to her stool. "I can't get him to ate at all. He sames to have no appetite. Did you hear anythin' more, Miss Maureen, of the sthrange things goin' on up at the chapel?"

Facing the window, Maureen lightly trimmed the flowers with her soft finger-tips.

"Only one egg!" said she.

"I'm tould," observed Mrs. Moriarty, looking mysteriously round, "that Father John's to make a statemint soon that'll surprise the whole world. Mrs. Doran tells me that yir good mother knows more nor any wan else. I suppose she's bin talkin' to you now about it, agra?"

"Mother never bothers me about such things," replied Maureen. "I hope he won't walk too far an' catch could."

"That's quare anyhow," said Mrs. Moriarty. "Yir mother so thick with Father John an' not spake to you. An' as for Mrs. Doran, I don't want to take any of the glory an' honour from off her, but I don't think she ought to be thryin' to set up beside wan of yir mother's station, Miss Maureen. Mrs. Doran an' me wor always good friends an' I'm no backbiter, but there's a great differ betwixt Mrs. Doran an' Mrs. Malone, I'm thinkin'."

Uttering a little scream, Maureen started back from the window. "Here's Father John! What'll I do? He'll see me!"

As she looked wildly about Mrs. Moriarty abruptly rose.

"Maybe ye'd betther git in there behind the cupboard, miss," she suggested. "He's only come for a look in an' won't stay whin he finds the schoolmasther out."

The chimney, built out from floor to ceiling, formed a recess where the cupboard stood, and a chintz curtain hanging between fireplace and cupboard hid some bookshelves. Behind this curtain Maureen took refuge, stooping under the lowest bookshelf and grasping the curtain on either side. There was a thump at the front door, which was thrust open, and Father John with a muffler coiled twice round his throat, his blackthorn in his hand, came in and looked about. He saw Mrs. Moriarty humbly curtseying before him.

"Where's the schoolmasther?" asked Father John, glancing towards the bedroom door. "Is he in bed?"

"Indade, yir riverence," replied Mrs. Moriarty, "indade, thin, I'm sorry to say, yir riverence, he's gone out for a walk."

"Gone out?" said Father John, with a disappointed look.

"Troth, he is, yir riverence."

"H'm!" muttered Father John.

Holding his double chin between forefinger and thumb, he looked about again and presently began to sniff. At length his keen eyes discovered Maureen's basket on the table.

"What have we here?" he asked suspiciously, crossing over and lifting the basket towards his nose.

"Plaise, yir riverence," exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty, feverishly following, "it's only a pair of chickens Miss

Maureen left for the schoolmasther afore you kem, yir riverence."

He raised up the little clean, white cloth which covered the chickens and stood regarding them, wetting his lips.

"She sames to take a great interest in this young man," said he, severely. "I'll have to look afther her. What d'you want, me good woman?" he inquired, turning sharply on Mrs. Moriarty, who stood beside him rubbing her hands and trembling for the safety of the fowl. "Git to yir work now and don't mind me."

She hobbled to the fireplace and began to stir up the turf with a bent poker. After a doubtful pause Father John replaced the basket, had another stare round the place, and walked slowly into the bedroom.

When he was gone Maureen, holding back the chintz curtain, looked eagerly out.

"Open the front door wide," she whispered to the old woman, "an' I'll run out!"

"Whisht, alanna," said Mrs. Moriarty in a terrified whisper, holding up her hand; "ye'll ruin me. He's comin' back."

Maureen hastily dropped the curtain and Mrs. Moriarty started rattling the poker between the bars of the grate when Father John appeared, his blackthorn under his arm and holding a roll of papers in a black calico cover. Without a word he walked across to the window, laid down his stick and the papers on the table beside the basket, and, having searched in his tail-pocket, drew forth his spectacles, wiped them with his large handkerchief, and put them on. Then, taking up the papers, he unfolded them and, turning his back

to the window for the better light, began to read at random.

"Monday night. Oh, my God, how shall I disentangle my soul from her attractions! To-day I saw her again. Her soft, tender fingers touched mine. I felt mad. I felt as might the saints when they first beheld the fabled paradise of the Christians."

Hitherto Father John, slowly following the words of the diary with his forefinger, had read to himself. He began now, unconsciously, to read aloud.

"Me sowl is bein' driven to an abyss which I contimplate in hopeless terror. How kin I, a poor schoolmasther, a tacher of squalid childher, dare to think of her other than as a stranger? I fight agin me overpowerin' love in the watches of the night. Even if she would stoop to care for me it would be criminal to ax her to lave the comforts, the luxuries of such a home—for what? Oh, Maureen, sweet, dainty, lovely Maureen, why did fate iver lade me into the magic sarcle of yir matchless inchantmint?"

Father John's arm was suddenly seized and his startled eyes saw Maureen before him, a wistful look on her face.

"Is that," she asked breathlessly, "is that all about me?"

He had backed against the window-sill, crumpling the diary in his hand, and for a moment remained trembling at the unexpected interruption. Presently he recovered, and his face from being pale turned very red.

"What d'you mane?" he said angrily. "How dar' you come out an' rush on me like that? What d'you mane be it at all? Isn't it a quare thing to be hidin'

about in a place like this? Is it lookin' for coortin' from a poor schoolmasther y'are? Chickens an' eggs an' flowers! Secratin' yirself behind curtins! Home with you now! An' that ould faggot there"—he turned more fiercely on Mrs. Moriarty, who threw her apron over her face—"with her ould white nightcap, settin' up to be a patthern of vartue an' decavin' her praste!"

Pulling down the apron, Mrs. Moriarty looked at him, livid with terror at his words.

"Yir riverence, yir riverence," she exclaimed, "I'm not a faggot—I'm not, yir riverence. Don't call me that, yir riverence! I was in clanin' up the schoolmasther's room whin Miss Maureen kem in unbeknownst. I'm not a faggot, yir riverence!"

"That'll do now," said Father John, stuffing the papers into his pocket; "I'll rade this at me laisure. Go home with you now, Maureen, an' don't let me find you here agin, or I'll be takin' stern misures."

"Oh, Father John," pleaded Maureen, still holding on to his arm, "is it fair to read any more? Won't you put it up where you got it?"

"Don't you hare me tellin' you to be off ow a' this!" said Father John, angrily. "Are you goin' to dictate to me what I'm to do an' what I'm not to do? Away with you now an' mind the warnin' I give you. It'll be worse for you if I hear tell of yir comin' here agin!"

For a moment Maureen stood looking at him and biting her lip; then, with a stamp of her foot, she turned and walked out of the house.

Father John was moving round the table to get

closer to the basket, when, looking sharply round, he saw Mrs. Moriarty watching him.

"What are you lookin' at?" said he. "Go on now wid yir prayers an' kape yir eyes on yir beads!"

With trembling fingers Mrs. Moriarty searched in her bosom until she found her beads, over which she bent, rapidly mumbling.

Turning his back on her, Father John, taking off the napkin, raised the basket to his nose and heaved a deep sigh of satisfaction. Softly wrenching a leg from one of the chickens, he quietly ate at it for some time, when he threw the bone into the corner. Mrs. Moriarty was bending low when she heard him close behind and she bent still lower.

"Don't let me iver hare of you," said Father John, "puttin' yir sowl in peril be pamperin' up the schoolmasther with dainties that'd give him thoughts above his station. Ye'd betther mind yirself now, for it's gettin' too careless y'are afther yir jooties."

She waited until she heard his feet on the gravel of the playground. Then she glanced over towards the table and her eyes grew larger as she slapped her hands on her knees.

"Howly Saint Bridget!" she exclaimed, "the good ould praste cursed the chickens, an' they flued up the chimbly!"

CHAPTER XVII

SCHOOLMASTER WEAK

WHEN Martin Harrington returned from his walk he found Mrs. Moriarty standing before a bit of looking-glass which she had placed against the window sash. She had tied her old black straw bonnet over her white nightcap, and was pinning a plaid shawl around her shoulders. She delivered Father John's message with unusual curtness, being weary of waiting for the schoolmaster's return. Martin went into his bedroom, and taking off his jacket rolled up his shirt-sleeves and had a brief wash in the cracked earthenware basin, which he lifted from the floor in a corner and placed on the table. Having put on a clean collar, he brushed his best frock-coat, holding it up to the waning light and shaking his head at the shiny elbows and the tea-stained lappets. When he left the room he found that Mrs. Moriarty had silently departed. He went out. Approaching the priest's house he saw the front door open, and Mrs. Doran on her knees scrubbing the stone step with a hard brush, a bucket of dirty water beside her—an operation which was watched with deep interest by half a dozen bare-footed children of the town who stood outside the

green-painted wooden railings of the small front garden. Hearing his footsteps, Mrs. Doran, without rising, ceased her work a moment, turned her hard face over her shoulder and called out that Father John had gone up to the chapel. Martin thanked her from the front gate—the children falling back to stare open-mouthed at his frock-coat—and, facing about, made his way down the road. The evening was so quiet that he could hear the scrubbing of Mrs. Doran's hard brush until he came to the turn leading up to the hill. When he had toiled up the curving path he found a mild light in the sacristy. Here he knocked, and Jackeen questioned him through the keyhole. The door being slightly opened, Jackeen fell back towards the shadow of the church, saying in a loud whisper—

"Father, the schoolmasther's come!"

Martin found himself left alone in the sacristy a few moments until Father John, the muffler still wound about his throat and with a skull cap on, came in and took him by the hand.

"Me dear boy," said Father John kindly, "I'm glad ye've come. Now, I'll tell you what I want."

He went back to close over the connecting door, then returned to Martin, who was standing nervously beside the centre table on which he had laid his hat.

"I want to thry you agin," resumed Father John, putting a hand on Martin's shoulder, "bekase the more tistimuny I have the betther. If you want to take part in a great an' sacred sarimony, now's yir chance. It's doin' you a great favour I am intirely, for it's not to iv'ry wan I'd give the chance. But you are an intelligent young man, an' I'd be glad to do you a good turn.

Now there are a couple of women inside that kin bear tistimuny to what they've seen, an' there's Jackeen an' wan or two others, not to mintion meself. But wid all that, I'd like to have you wid us bekase yir ividence'd be a power. I axed you before if you noticed anythin' quare about the statya of the howly Mother an' Child." He crossed himself, muttered a prayer, and resumed: "An' maybe I was a bit cranky bekase you didn't see all at wanst; but you must bear wid me, for I'm an ould man, an' I have a bad cowld that I think's goin' down to me chist. I want to be a friend to you, for yer'll want friends, an' I thought maybe ye'd be in a betther frame of mind, for," added Father John solemnly, "it's not to iv'ry wan to be given to see this wonderful thing, but only to thim that has the grace of God in their hearts an' minds. Come wid me now, achushla, an' I'll explain things betther, whin we're before the altar rails."

Martin Harrington endeavoured to understand this involved explanation, but the only thing he clearly understood was, that Father John's utterance was markedly affected by a cold. Jackeen had silently re-entered and was listening, with his back against the wall in a far corner. When Father John had finished speaking he made a signal to the boy, who, snatching a lighted candle from a shelf, raised the light shoulder-high and stole on in advance. Following Father John, Martin entered the church, where, on a front seat, he dimly saw the muffled figure of an unknown woman, with another woman in the seat behind, both silent and motionless. A glare of light in mid-air from two candles lit the wooden statue of the Virgin, whose face alone was uncovered, the figure up to the neck being

swathed in many folds of black cloth tightened with winds of thin rope. Having placed his candle on the steps outside the altar rails, Jackeen sat close to it, his crossed ankles tucked under him, his chin resting on his doubled hands, whilst he bent forward gazing on those in front. From the verge of the shadows cast by the lights either side of the statue the darkness rapidly deepened to intense blackness in the body of the church.

"Sit down, me child," said Father John in a hoarse whisper, pressing Martin into the seat close to the first unknown woman; "kape yir eye on the face of the blessed statya."

Tucking up the tails of his coat, he, himself, sat down on the far side of the schoolmaster, and a deep silence ensued. For some time Martin sat rigid, holding his breath, then with both hands gripped his seat, and struggled against a desire to shriek. He could feel the breathing of the woman behind on the back of his neck. As he concentrated his gaze on the face of the wooden statue the figure seemed to travel away an immense distance becoming exceedingly small, until the woman behind gave a faint, dry cough, when the statue came back with startling suddenness to its normal size. He turned to gaze at Jackeen, who instantly began to travel into space with dizzy rapidity. Closing his eyes, Martin pressed his fingers on the hot lids. Presently he gave a violent start. Father John, bending forward, had grasped him by the knee.

"D'you see anythin', my child?"

"Nothing unusual," replied Martin in a choked voice.

"Look agin at it!" said Father John, sternly. "I give you wan more chance. Look agin!"

Once more silence returned with the breathing of the woman on the back of his neck, the rapid migration of the figures in front, until Martin moaned in agony.

"Ha!" whispered Father John, "you see it? You see the eyes openin' and shuttin', then?"

"No," answered Martin, aloud. "Let me go away."

Seizing him by the wrist, Father John almost lifted him from the seat; then, releasing him, stamped on towards the sacristy, his heel-taps echoing back from the black vault of the church. Martin stumbled after, groping with both arms, whilst the women and Jackeen followed.

In the sacristy Father John, facing about, struck his hand on the table, frowning heavily as the trembling schoolmaster entered.

"I'm done wid you now!" exclaimed Father John, furiously. "I've given you two chances an' you wudn't take them. You might have had me for a friend, but now ye'll know what it is to have me for an inemy. I ax you now, for the third an' last time, did you see the eyes of the howly Vargin move?"

Jackeen, having already entered, had placed the candle in its former place. Father John stood with his clenched hand on the table and Martin bent his head, but remained silent.

"Won't you say it to plaze Father John?" whispered a voice in his ear.

Raising and turning his face, Martin saw behind him the soft, sweet face of Maureen's mother.

"It is the sainted woman," said Father John, significantly, "that first saw the miracle. Will you go forth to the world, young man, an' proclaim the

mother of Maureen a liar an' a hypocrite? I ax you for the last time, did you see the eyes of the blessed Vargin move?"

Martin Harrington suddenly drew in his shoulders.

"I did," he replied.

Next Sunday, when Father John made his statement, the chapel attendance was so enormous that the large front doors stood wide, leaving a vista of craning faces as far as one could see. After Mass, Father John stood on the steps before the altar rails in his robes and gazed, for some moments in silence, on the great assembly. A dark crimson canopy, with a hood bordered in yellow fringe, had been placed at the back of the statue, the figure being still swathed from head to feet in black cloth. There was deep silence when Father John slowly raised his right hand.

"My friends, my dear friends," said he, "it is very hard for me to spake to you about the sthrange matther that I know many of you have heard about, bekase, in the first place, I've got a bad cowld on my chest, an' in the next place, my dear friends, I'm almost afear'd to mintion it. An' why am I almost afear'd to mintion it? Bekase," bending forward and holding back his vestments with one hand, he raised the other in solemn gesture, "bekase there are some things that are almost too sacred to mintion, an' this is wan of them. Some time ago" (he lapsed now into the old conversational manner so dear to his flock), "I noticed, as I went about the sacred edifice, attended only by that dear boy," he pointed to his chief acolyte, Jackeen, who stood at the far end of the altar rails, looking modestly down as the people stood up to stare at him. "Sit

down, now," said Father John, "sit down there, if you plaze, an' let the people outside the door hear me words if I kin raitch them. As I was telling yiz, I thought I noticed somethin' quare about the statya of the Blessed Vargin." There was another restless movement as the people turned to stare at the canopy, and once more, Father John had to entreat them to be calm. "I couldn't," he resumed, "belave me sinses. Was I, I axed meself, was I, an ould parish praste, worn out by a lifetime of jooties to me flock, was I to be singled out be Providence for a wondherful an' special mark of Divine favour? Now, be attintive to me. I doubted me sinses. I ax the pardon of Divine Providence for havin' doubted the missage sint to me by Divine grace, but a praste has his wakenesses as well as other min. Widout givin' a hint or a sign of what I'd seen, I axed that dear boy if he'd noticed anythin'. 'Father,' says he, 'the Vargin's movin' her eyes!' Sit down!" exclaimed Father John excitedly, as the entire congregation rose to their feet and there was a surging movement beyond the doors. "Sit down, in the name of God, an' listen to me. 'Father,' says he, 'the howly Vargin's movin' her eyes an' lookin' at me!' says he. Agin, bein' only a wake ould man, I doubted an' had me fears. The divil was thryin' to bind me sowl in his fetthers of darkniss. Now, listen to me. There are two howly women in this parish that it has plazed God to give this wondhrous sight to. Wan of thim—the first of her sex to see this miracle—is Mrs. Malone, an' the other Mrs. Delahunt. You know thim. Nayther of thim had a hint or word, an' whin they saw it, wan afther the other, I said to meself, 'Praises be to God, that Carrickmachree has bin singled out—a poor,

neglected parish—Carrickmachree has bin singled out to show this wondhrous miracle to the world!' Remimber, me friends, it's not the richest places that God, in His wisdom, favours; for did He not sind His only Son, our Blessed Lord, to be born in Galilee, the poorest an' most despised place in Juday? An' still I was not satisfied, for the divil, growin' terrified that these things should happen in Carrickmachree, the divil, I say, wint about to terrify me wid doubt an' weakeniss. I said, 'I'll have tistimony from another; I'll git a sthranger, a man of education, a man accustomed to argufy about the sinses.' I says, 'I'll git Misther Harrington, our new schoolmasther,' says I, 'an' I'll test him.' Me friends, the same thing happened. Misther Harrington knew nothin' of why I wanted him. I set him down there on the front binch, an' I axed, 'D'you see anythin'?' An' behould, the same occurred to him! I call for tistimony. Mrs. Malone, I ax you to stan' up."

From the front seats rose Mrs. Malone, the most richly dressed woman in the place, smiling nervously.

"Mrs. Malone," said Father John, "before all the congregation, before this sacred althar an what it contains, I ax you now, did you see the howly Vargin give a miraklis sign by the movin' of her eyes?"

He paused. The people with stretched necks drew in their breath. In a low but distinct voice Mrs. Malone replied.

"Yes, father," said she, "indade an' indade I did!"

A long sigh of awe passed through the church when she had spoken. Father John, red and perspiring,

wiped his face with a handkerchief, then waved his hand to Mrs. Malone, who remained standing.

"That'll do, achushla," said he. "You may sit down. Mrs. Delahunt! Is Mrs. Delahunt prisent!"

"I'm here, yir riverence!"

Five rows back sat Mrs. Delahunt; she quickly rose, glancing round with a smart air of triumph at her husband, who in the opposite corner sat a gloomy contrast to the crowd of astonished and excited faces around him.

"Mrs. Delahunt," said Father John, "you heard the question I axed Mrs. Malone. Did you see the same?"

"Indade I did, yir riverence. I saw——"

"Hush, hush!" cried Father John, "Sit down, Mrs. Delahunt; I know what you saw an' you know what I saw. But I want all prisent here to see with their own eyes, an', plaze God, if they have the grace of God in their hearts they will! I call on Misther Harrington!"

There was expectant silence. Father John looked over the heads of the people. The people turned about one way and another to see the schoolmaster, but he did not appear.

"Perhaps he's outside there," suggested Father John, standing on his toes and looking towards the open doors, "an' can't get in. Go down, Jackeen, an' see."

Proceeding down the aisle Jackeen vanished for some minutes outside amongst the crowd, who, with great respect, made way for him. Meanwhile Father John sat down and coughed into his handkerchief.

When Jackeen returned and whispered something

to Father John, the latter, growing redder, coughed with marked severity.

"Me friends," he explained, rising again, "Misther Harrington tould me he'd be sure an' come, but I undherstan' he's not very well, sufferin' like meself with a heavy cowld on him. This wan thing's sartin, he'd be here if he could put wan foot before another, an' I'll promise you he'll be here nixt Mass. Now, me friends, I've towld you what's bin on me mind a long time past. Nixt Mass I'll unveil the sacred an' miraklis statya so that you kin all see, if God wills, an' judge for yirselves widout any words from me or widout takin' any tistiminy I've offered yiz. It may have only bin permitted to thim I've mintioned an' to meself to see this miracle. That may be the will of God. Whativer He ordains we must submit to. I'll ask yiz now to go home quietly an' prepare yirselves for the sight of the sacred an' miraklis statya; an' I thank God it has bin given to Carrickmachree to have such a wondherful an' miraklis thing."

Slowly the congregation departed, but long after midnight the little town remained crowded.

CHAPTER XVIII

SCHOOLMASTER STRONG

NEXT evening when Mrs. Malone and Maureen called on Father John they found him sitting before a big fire, his feet in a steaming tub of water, a blanket over his knees, and a shawl about his shoulders. At the sight Mrs. Malone sat down in consternation on the opposite side of the fireplace and raised her hands.

"Och! Father John," she exclaimed, "is this the way I find you?"

"That's the way you find me," replied Father John, huskily. "Maybe God won't permit me to see the end of this business. If it's His will I'll go, an' I'm prepared to go!"

"Don't say that! Don't say that!" said Mrs. Malone, in distress. "Sure, it's only a cowld, an', plaze God, you'll be better if you'll stay in the house for a day or two."

"I don't mind the cowld," said Father John; "bad as it is I don't mind it. I don't mind if God calls me away even now, whin He has given me such tokens of His special grace. Sit down, Maureen, sit down, me girl, an' don't be starin' at me as if I had two

heads on me body. There's a sate for you foreninst yir good mother. If I'm to die I'm to die, an' there's an end to it." Turning to raise a glass of punch from the table and holding the spoon against the glass with his little finger, he took a long mouthful. "It's not the cowld," he resumed, placing the tumbler back; "it's the backslidin' of that proud, stiffnecked young man!"

"Who? What?" gasped Mrs. Malone. "What's troublin' you, father, agra?"

He struck his hand on his knee.

"Misther Harrington's thrubblin' me!" he exclaimed. "A backslider an' an infidel! I went to him afther Mass, an' the sorra sick he was. It was schamin' he was. He repints of what he calls his folly. He says now that he decaved me, an' decaved himself by sayin' that he saw what you saw an' what I saw, and what Mrs. Delahunt saw. He refuses to bear testimony. What d'you think of that? He refused to bear testimony! Afther what I said from the althar steps. Afther houldin' him up as a patthern an' a paragon! I've to face the congregation agin an' make mesèlf out a liar."

"Och! Father John, Father John," exclaimed Mrs. Malone. "This is terrible. To think of that!"

"I hope you won't be too hard on him, father," suggested Maureen, anxiously.

"Ye'r too much consarned about this young man!" said Father John, turning on her. "Like the other day when you called at his house wid chickens an' flowers."

"Maureen!" said her mother, opening her eyes widely.

Maureen blushed.

"Ould Mrs. Moriarty was there," she explained, "an' Misther Harrington was out."

"No matther whether he was in or out," said Father John; "it was no place for a young girl; puttin' yirself in danger. Ye'll have to be looked afther for yir own good."

As he looked round for the tumbler again, Mrs. Malone hastened to get it, standing beside him until he drank, when she replaced it and resumed her seat.

"I know what I'll do wid him," said Father John, rolling his eyes: "I'll dinounce him!"

"Oh no, father, no!" said Maureen, turning white.

"What else should I do?" said Father John. "D'you think I'll make a liar of myself before the whole parish? An' more nor that, for the whole world'll soon be talkin' of it! Didn't yir mother here hear him say wid her own ears that he'd seen the miracle? An' now he goes back on it!"

"But to denounce him!" panted Maureen. "Oh! Father John, that'd be too terrible. Sure, it would ruin him. If you do it I'll never spake to you again," she added threateningly—"never!"

"Maureen!" protested her mother, alarmed.

"I don't care, mother!" said Maureen, with a defiant toss of her head. "I don't care! I'll never spake to Father John agin if he does. That's all!"

"Such a way to spake to yir praste!" murmured Mrs. Malone, horrified.

"He's brought it on himself," said Father John.

Nothing was said for some moments while Father John opened and shut his eyes at the fire. Maureen,

who had defiantly closed her lips together, began to soften.

"Father John," she suggested, "maybe if I went to him an' spoke to him I might—I might bring him round."

Turning to her, Father John gazed steadily at her for some time.

"You, Maureen!" exclaimed her mother.

As Father John still remained silent, Mrs. Malone looked doubtfully at him.

"I don't know," she added, "what Father John'd say to that."

"You may go, Maureen," said Father John.

"You may go, Maureen," repeated Mrs. Malone, contentedly.

Maureen instantly stood up and began to feel her back hair.

"But wait a minute," said Father John. "Hand me the spoon out of the tumbler," he said to Mrs. Malone.

When he had it he scooped up some water from the tub and, closing his eyes, spread his fingers above the spoon, at the same time muttering some words, while Mrs. Malone watched the incantation with rapt attention.

"Now," said he, offering the spoon to Maureen, "dip yir fingers in that, me child, an' cross yirself. It's howly wather now and will protect you."

Lightly touching the water, Maureen did as desired, and Mrs. Malone heaved a sigh of relief.

"Go now, alanna," said Father John wearily, "an' the blessin' of God go wid you."

Maureen began to shake out her skirts and settle her

hat. Mrs. Malone, finding that the water in the tub was cold, asked permission to replenish it.

"Thank you, achushla," answered Father John; "the kittle's on the hob."

Mrs. Malone lifted the puffing kettle, while Father John, pulling up the blanket, balanced both feet on the rim of the tub.

"So I can go, mother?" observed Maureen brightly, having finished her toilette.

As she poured the hot water into the tub Mrs. Malone looked up through a cloud of steam.

"Father John has given you lave," she returned, impressively. And Maureen went out.

The moon, shining back of the firs fringing the hill which sheltered Kelly's Cabin, threw a shadow of the schoolmaster's house which seemed to swallow up Maureen as she approached. Looking through the window, she saw the glare of the turf fire on the metal kitchen things hung around the wall. When she knocked a match was struck, then a candle lit. Martin Harrington called out, "Who's there?" and she answered, "Maureen." The bolt being withdrawn, she saw the schoolmaster shading the flame of the candle with his hand, the lower part of his face white, and black shadows under his eyes. She stepped in, and when he closed the door he turned, still holding the candle, and gazed on her with strange astonishment. Maureen rested herself against the deal table.

"What have you been doin' with yourself?" she asked.

"Nothin' at all," he replied. "Sittin' over the fire, thinking."

Laying the candle on the table, he remained standing before her, awaiting her explanation.

"That's such a quare lonely way to spend the time," said Maureen, "when you should be out in the open air takin' a walk, or in bed resting—for you're none too strong. But," she added, with a laugh, "I didn't come to scold you about your health. I've bin at Father John's with mother, an' he's told us all. Oh, aren't you running terrible risks, entirely, to go back on your word to Father John?"

His hand lay doubled on the table, which trembled as she shifted uneasily about while speaking, and his head was bent; but, when she ceased, he looked up quietly.

"Father John was here," said he.

"I know. He told us so—mother an' me."

"I explained to him," said Martin slowly, "how it was that I came to pretend that I saw the miracle he was so anxious about—I mean, I endeavoured to explain, for I was something confused about it, myself."

"But Father John says you saw it!" exclaimed Maureen. "He told the whole people you saw it, an' he told mother an' me that you told him you saw it."

"That is what I am trying to tell you," said Martin submissively. "It was after I had been out, and when you came while I was out." He pronounced "You" so softly that Maureen blushed and looked down. "When I went up to the chapel," he went on, "at his request, an' your mother was there, an' the place was only half lit, an' your mother asked me to say I saw this business, an' to please her, an' because she was your mother, I said so."

"Yes, I know," said Maureen, looking perplexed. "But why did you go back on your word? That's what has put Father John in such a terrible temper. An' d'you know what he says? He says he'll denounce you from the altar!"

The schoolmaster's face turned ashen of hue, and, gasping, he sank down in the chair beside the table.

"Isn't that a dreadful thing altogether?" said Maureen, looking in distress at him.

"I—I understand," returned Martin, speaking with difficulty, "what that means very well. But"—his voice grew hoarse—"I must be true to myself, first of all. I've been weak. But I cannot persist in a lie."

With a gesture of surprise, Maureen started back from him.

"A lie?" she repeated. "A lie to say that you saw the miracle?"

"That is so," he replied, more firmly. "It was a lie that I saw any miracle, or saw anything except what might be suggested by the flickering of light." Rising, he seemed to look stronger and taller than usual. "I'll have no hand or part in this, no matter what it costs!"

"But," urged Maureen, "you've only to say 'Yes.' That's not very hard to say, is it? Only one little, weeshy word!"

"It is a little word," said Martin Harrington, "but, now, it is like a big rock that I can't get over."

Silently, Maureen looked down, turning the bangles on her wrist round and round. Presently she looked up shyly.

"For me?" she said softly.

All the blood in his body seemed suddenly in his head. He pressed his hand to his forehead.

"Did you hear?" said Maureen, in a low voice.

"But, don't you see," he stammered huskily, "it's asking me to commit suicide—tearing my soul with my own hands?"

"Suicide!" exclaimed Maureen, with horror. "Sure, that's a terrible thing to think about."

"For your sake," he murmured, "I would die for that. But not to say 'Yes.' No, I couldn't do that."

"Don't ever talk of suicide," said Maureen, shuddering. "I only want you to plase Father John. Mother saw the miracle; so did Mrs. Delahunt, an' Father John himself. Won't you say that you did, then?"

He had crossed to the chair beside the wall, where he sat down, his face in his hands. When she spoke, he looked up and silently shook his head.

"Very well," said Maureen, choking back a sob, "I'll go."

She opened the door, and was some paces without when he arrived beside her.

"May I not see you safe on your way?" he asked.

As Maureen, pausing, turned to look at him, her face in the moonlight was very sad.

"I'd rather go alone," said she. "No one will harm Maureen."

When she arrived back at the priest's house, the door was opened by Mrs. Doran, who followed her into the room. The tub, having the blanket trailing in the water, had been pushed aside when she knocked; saw Father John was weary, and wished to go to bed. was you risen, and Mrs. Malone, with a hot-water jar

wrapped in a shawl, stood behind him as he faced round when Maureen appeared.

"Well, me child?" he asked, holding on to the table. "What about the schoolmasther?"

Maureen silently shook her head.

"He sticks to his backslidin'!" exclaimed Father John bitterly. "That's his gratitude for me care of him an' me goodness towards him! May God forgive him! Come, agra," to Mrs. Malone, "help me a bit up the stairs."

Mrs. Malone took his arm, Mrs. Doran taking the other, and together they assisted him. As his slippered feet crossed the threshold, Maureen hurried after.

"You won't denounce him, father! Oh, say you won't!"

"I know what to do, Maureen," said he, glancing back. "I know how to thrate liars an' infidels. Mrs. Doran, go for the candle. Mrs. Malone'll help me up."

As they passed out, Maureen shrank back and covered her face, alone with her first great grief.

CHAPTER XIX

SAINT OF CARRICKMACHREE

HAVING spent the greater part of the day on his farm, Mr. Malone returned home in the evening, hungry but cheerful, for the promise of the harvest seemed brighter than ever. Before dismounting in the stable-yard, he shouted for Larry, but there was no sign of Larry or any one else. After an astonished gaze around, he led the mare into a stable himself, and gave it a feed. When he went out he shouted for Larry again, and Pat and John, but there was no response. He looked into one stable after another; walked into the outer yard, through the wash-house into the kitchen. There was no person to be seen, and he remembered then that, while in the uplands, he had observed streams of people wending towards the chapel. Having helped himself to some bread and cold meat, he went out, brushing the crumbs from his lips whilst he pondered over the situation with contracted brows. Once out on the high-road, he found the whole district alive with people. As he pressed on with the crowd towards the chapel, he noticed that those immediately around him were mostly strangers dressed in their best, and, at the same time, he remem-

bered that he was in his rough working clothes. Politely forcing a way, he turned back to the town.

In the thronged main street he made progress with comparative freedom, absently returning the salutations of his acquaintances.

Near Mr. Delahunt's, standing up in a cart, there was a woman talking excitedly to the crowd. It was old Mrs. Moriarty, with a black bonnet over her white frilled nightcap.

"It's as thrue as gospel!" she protested. "An' I've tould all about it now."

"What is it?" cried a new voice. "I didn't hear."

As fresh comers pressed round, Mr. Malone mildly stepped aside.

"I've bin a suff'rer," explained Mrs. Moriarty, "for two year an' five months wid rheumatics in me jints. There was manys an' manys the night I couldn't git a wink of slape, an' had to git up an' wrap an ould shawl about me, an' walk up an' down the room the livelong night."

"I've done it meself," remarked another old woman, "many's the time. Sure, I kin fale for you, achushla!"

"An' me, too."

"An' me."

"An' sure," continued Mrs. Moriarty, "there's none of yiz now nade suffer pain or ache more if yiz have the right mind. For, I must tell yiz, an' I have it from Father John himself, if yiz don't have the right sperrit an' the grace of God in yiz, there's no use expectin' a miracle. But, as I was tellin' yiz, the pains an' aches I suffered wor enough to melt the heart of a stone. But, praises be to God, thanks to the howly statyt of the Blessed Vargin, I'm widout the taste or sign of

rheumatics to-day. I've bin cured, an' it's me jooty to make known the glad tidin's. It was Mrs. Malone, a saint on the earth, first saw the blessed miracle, an' there," added Mrs. Moriarty, pointing, "stan's her good husband, that will bear me out in what I say. He ought to be the proud man to-day, to be the husband of the Saint of Carrickmachree!"

Suddenly becoming the centre of excited interest, Mr. Malone, showing signs of nervous alarm, burst away unceremoniously towards the shop of Mr. Delahunt. Here he had some difficulty in entering. Thanks, however, to the fact that he was recognised as the husband of the Saint of Carrickmachree, the people began to make way for him with expressions of pious awe. Inside, owing to his stature, he could gaze over the heads of the customers. There were several large lamps lit, including the great one swinging from the centre of the smoke-daubed ceiling. All traces of miscellaneous trading had disappeared, the long counter being besieged by persons solely anxious to obtain drink. The three Delahunt girls were as busy as they could be, and Mr. Delahunt himself, with shirt-sleeves rolled up and eyes dancing in excitement, seemed to be everywhere at once. For some time he did not notice Mr. Malone, who stood, with his back against the bar-parlour, staring dumfoundered around.

"This way, Misther Malone!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt. "I've just a momint. This way!"

Mr. Malone saw the shopkeeper's shirt-sleeves waving him in the direction of the little office. He slowly with those ing round and followed. Closing the door, Mr. dressed nunt wiped his weeping brows in his sleeve,

then caught the bewildered farmer by his nerveless hand.

"Am I dhramin' in my snug bed at home?" inquired Mr. Malone, "or am I wandherin' about like a loonatic?"

While he spoke, he gazed at Mr. Delahunt as if the little shopkeeper was a long way off.

"God bless you an' yir sainted wife!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt, wringing his hand. "The tide's turned. Mrs. Delahunt's proved herself wan in a thousand. I used to objict to her bein' so much given to religious obsarvances. That was a mortial sin in me, an' I'll have to wipe it out as soon as I've time. She's a blessed saint. Would you like to see her? Just have a look at the snuggery. You needn't go in. Them that goes in to look at her puts somethin' in the collectin'-box."

"For the love of Heaven, Pathrick Delahunt," exclaimed Mr. Malone, like a tortured man, "will you hould yir whisht? Kape hould of me hand a moment, for there's a quare buzzin' in me mind. I don't know anythin' myself about theologicalism. I remimber, twinty years ago at Killmullruddery, there was a big fair, an' a man in a public-house was houldin' forth on transmogrification of sowls. But I didn't undherstan' a word. There was a power of boneens sould that day. Am I dhramin'," he added, putting a hand to his forehead, "walkin' about in me slape with niver a Christian to pinch my arm an' wake me up?"

He took out a large handkerchief to wipe his distraught face. When he looked up, he was alone. Slowly he stepped back into the shop and saw Mr. Delahunt behind the counter pulling corks as if for a

wager. Feebly pushing towards the front door, Mr. Malone, seeming to recollect something, halted and turned back a pace towards the bar-parlour. The door was guarded by a strange man in black, who opened it at intervals, admitting but one person at a time. When Mr. Malone approached this man expectantly opened the door. But Mr. Malone did not enter. He saw the long table with a crimson cloth on it. At the head sat Mrs. Delahunt, dressed all in white with a large box before her, into which the people who stared at her silently dropped their contributions before passing out through the far door. On either side of the box were two long wax candles shedding a yellow glitter on Mrs. Delahunt's severe features. Mr. Malone's glimpse occupied an instant. Turning about, he made blindly for the street, craving for fresh air. When he got out, the crowds were greater than before. Pushing on, he passed the cart, and again heard Mrs. Moriarty explaining her miraculous cure to the gaping audience. Near the end of the town he was startled by cries—

"She's comin'! She's comin' out!"

Hustled along by the excited mob, before he could decide on a definite course, he found himself close to the chapel. About the same time there was a stampede —those in front surging back. Mr. Malone discovered that he was returning, and at last remained with his back against the front gate of Father John's garden, hemmed in on all sides.

The immediate excitement was due to the departure of a woman from the chapel. She was dressed in black, wearing a black silk cape or mantle ornamented with jet beads, her veil down. The rush of the people

towards her was stemmed by the police, who closed around her, whilst the crowd followed, shouting—

"There she is!"

Again and again attempts were made to break the cordon of police by enthusiasts endeavouring to touch her garments. When the procession approached, Mr. Malone stood on tip-toe, and as it passed the woman raised her veil to smile sweetly on the excited people. Then Mr. Malone grew deathly cold and trembled. He had recognised his wife!

Her eyes being dazzled with waves of faces, Mrs. Malone did not see her husband. Fearful of another public recognition, he slid away, striving to get across the street in the tail of the crowd. Next moment there was a fresh stampede and shouts of "Father John!" and the big farmer was stuck against the wheels of a cart. Here Mrs. Moriarty still remained, resting from time to time whilst refreshed with drink brought by admirers. She was rising, rather unsteadily, and began—

"What I want to tell yiz is what I've tould yiz before, an', plase God, will tell to me dyin' day——"

The people, swerving, parted to admit Father John, very red, with a muffler about his throat, and Father Felix behind, smiling good-humouredly. As soon as they reached the cart there was a pause. Father John looked up at Mrs. Moriarty, who began to curtsey.

"What are you doin' up there, me good woman?" said Father John. "Come down ow a' that. I want to spake a few words."

A dozen arms instantly lifted Mrs. Moriarty, her heels kicking the air, whilst Father John was assisted

into her place. When he stood, looking round over the hundreds of faces, all hats were removed. First untying his muffler, Father John took off his soft hat, from which he produced a handkerchief to wipe his face; then, holding both hat and handkerchief in his left hand, raised his right. The roaring died away to the outskirts of the crowd.

"Friends," said Father John, "an' neighbours all, God bliss you! God bliss iv'ry man, woman, an' child of yiz!"

A deep murmur of "Amen!" swelled and swept through the dense crowd; then silence.

"I'm goin' to spake t' yiz," continued Father John, "although I've a terrible bad cowld on me chist, an' me voice is worn out. But I want to say a word to the hundreds, ay, an' the thousands of dacent people who couldn't git in to see the miraklis statya to-day. I want to say that wid the advice of me good friend, Father Faylix——"

He paused as a tremendous cheer burst forth for handsome Father Felix, who smilingly showed his strong white teeth and shook his head in self-depreciation.

"What I mane is this," explained Father John, after a cough. "I kin only spake a word or two. Thousands of yiz haven't seen the miraklis statya, but, plase God, I'll have a door dhriven through the back wall, so that you kin all pass in an' out in percession, dacent an' riverent, for I know that there's no other way. I'll have the door made at wanst, an' there'll be no delay."

Here Father Felix stretched forward to touch him on the arm, and Father John bent down to listen.

"Father Faylix," he explained, rising again, "has reminded me to mintion the miraklis cures alriddy made. Remimber, now! Any of yiz that have sick or sufferin' may hope to be cured. An' now goodbye, an' God bless iv'ry wan of yiz."

Assisted by many careful hands, he descended from the cart, and, taking Father Felix's arm, walked across to his house, the crowd backing to keep a clear road.

Heaving a sigh of relief, Mr. Malone straightened himself to look round for some way of escape, when he was recognised by those close to him, and the news spread that he was in their midst. In a moment he was seized, hoisted into the cart, which was surrounded by people wildly cheering him by name. Some strong men, shifting the cart, pulled it down the street. To avoid being tumbled out, Mr. Malone sat down, holding the seat tightly with both hands and gazing dumfoundered at the sea of faces and waving hats on all sides. In this manner he was paraded through the town, making slow progress. He sat, grimly silent, abandoning himself to his fate. Turning back from the end of the main street, the people dragged the cart all the way to the farmhouse, meeting the returning police escort as they approached. Standing up, Mr. Malone vainly appealed for release. He was dragged to his own door, and the instant the cart stopped he made a wild leap and dashed into the house.

CHAPTER XX

SERENADERS

HASTILY closing the front door, Mr. Malone lurched into the room on his left, where he found his wife seated on a high chair with half a dozen women standing about her, and Maureen behind. At sight of his torn coat and his confused face, which was white with the exception of a purple bar across the forehead, Mrs. Malone rose and her attendants fell back as she stepped from her footstool.

"Is it possible, Dinnis," she exclaimed, reproachfully, "you were out on such a day in your workin' clothes?"

Stepping back against the wall, he wiped his brow with his ragged sleeve.

"Why, Honor," said he, "what day is it?"

Before replying, Mrs. Malone looked round at her women and raised her hands and eyebrows, an action which was imitated by most of the others. She turned to her husband.

"Surely, Dinnis," she said, in a low voice, "you must know it's the feast of Teresa Mary of Navarrino?"

"Sure, then," he returned remorsefully, "it's sorry I am, but the divil a know I knew!"

At these words Mrs. Malone gave a shocked start, hastily gathered up her skirts and left the room, followed reverently by the women, who cast reproachful looks on Mr. Malone as they went by.

He remained for some minutes, his back against the wall, staring after the procession; then turning, discovered Maureen.

"What day did she say it was, agra?" he asked.

"The feast of Teresa Mary of Navarrino, dads," replied Maureen.

Sitting down on the nearest chair and pressing his hands between his knees, he stared hard at the floor, while Maureen came over and, standing beside him, softly stroked his hair.

"You're tired, dads, aren't you?" she asked.

"Maureen," he said, suddenly looking up at her. "What's it all about? Am I in my right sinses at all, at all?"

"Sure, dads, you're at home now, with Maureen."

Sitting upright, he struck his knee with his fist.

"I don't belave it!" he exclaimed, with conviction. "It's in some quare dhrame I am; an'"—he looked about in a bewildered manner—"the worst of it is, I dunno how to get out of it! That's quarer still. Honor Malone a saint an' her husband out in his workin' clothes! Where am I at all? Who am I?"

Sliding her arm about his neck, Maureen gave him a hug.

"You're Misther Malone, the big, cliver farmer, an' I'm little Maureen, his daughter."

When he glanced up again at her, she bent down and kissed him. He sighed deeply.

"This mather of religious excitement," he observed, meditatively, "is an affair of constitutionality."

Always troubled by his use of long words, which she knew indicated mental worry, Maureen pressed his head against her bosom.

"Dads," said she, "I think you're tired, an' you ought to go to bed."

Gently thrusting her aside, he rose, shaking himself and stretching up his arms, after which he looked at his torn sleeves one after another and laughed strangely.

"Quare," said he; "but when all's said an' done, I must go out an' look after the cattle. So I'll git a lanthorn an' have a look round; for you know, Maureen, I couldn't slape a wink if I hadn't a look round."

"Can I go with you, dads?"

Turning slowly in the doorway, he smiled back at her.

"Is it the likes of you go ploddin' about a stable-yard at this hour?" said he. "Get along wid you, avic!"

About midnight, Maureen, who could not sleep, came from her room in slippered feet, wrapped in a thick cloak, through the landing which divided the upper rooms. She was at once conscious of a mild breeze and then, in the moonlight, she saw a dark figure near the window at the end of the passage. After a moment's startled contemplation she went quickly forward.

"Dads, didn't you go to bed at all?"

As she spoke, she sank, smiling, down at his feet;

and Mr. Malone, who was seated at the window, gazing thoughtfully out towards the town, let his hand fall lightly to her shoulder.

"Is it you, Maureen? Sure, this is no place for you, an' I thinking you wor fast aslape. No, sure divil a wink could I slape meself wid all this noise an' uproar."

Bending forward Maureen looked out. There were dark, moving masses of people on the roads. There was shouting, singing; the distant throb of drums.

"There's no sign of slape in Carrickmachree to-night,' continued Mr. Malone, looking afar over Maureen's head, "an' I've niver seen the like since I was a bit of a gossoon. It's more like a dhrame to me nor anythin' else. The only thing is, that labour ought to be plentiful an' chape, thanks be to God. That's," he added after a pause, "if I can git hould of them in time. I was readin' the papers yestherdá an' I saw there was a cyclone crossin' the Atlantic to burst itself on these shores, with the help of God, in a day or two. If that American storm isn't circumnavigated in time it'll play the divil an' all wid the harvist!"

Maureen quickly squeezed his hand.

"Oh, dads, listen!"

There had been a sudden, wild outburst of cheering on the roads, and the dark masses were illumined by numerous torches.

"Sure, they're only amusin' themselves," suggested Mr. Malone, repressing his alarm.

"Dads, I'm so frightened!" exclaimed Maureen.

He looked down hastily at her and saw her face ghastly in the moonbeam.

"Wurra, wurra, go to bed, me child," said he. "This is no hour for you to be up. What's there to be frightened about?"

"About Misther Harrington," said Maureen, hysterically. "Oh, dads, if they should kill him!"

"Kill him? What's the matter wid you, Maureen?"

Tightly clasping his hand, she pressed closer to his knees.

"When I think of the poor boy," she sobbed "all alone there, an' if Father John only raised a finger they'd tear Martin to pieces. I know they would. Oh, dads, I wish he was here; for then they wouldn't harm him."

"An' why not here as well as there?" asked her father, anxiously.

"Because they look on mother as a saint."

Mr. Malone said nothing, but he leaned forward listening. The roaring of the crowd had abated.

"I can see the schoolmaster's house, avic," he remarked, "an' there's not a sowl near it."

"Thank God!" murmured Maureen, "Thank God!"

Things seemed to grow quieter now in the direction of the town; and, in the soft light of the moon, with Maureen's head on his knees, Mr. Malone grew meditative.

"Bekase yir mother's a saint," he said, in a sort of soliloquy. "That's one of the quare things that puzzles me. For, wid all respect, saints always seemed wake cratures whin I seen them on the glass windas, lookin' as if they'd be the betther of a square male. Not that I'd set up to judge. God forbid! I stan' by the religion I was born an' reared in. I'm no one to run down my Church. But yir mother got stout afther Jackeen, an'

wouldn't look right like, on a stain-glass winda. Saint Teresa Mary of Lettherkenny !"

"Navarrino, dads," murmured Maureen.

"I niver heard of her anyhow," he said, with a sigh. "But that's my own ignorance an' I'm not going to defend it. All I wanted to say is, I don't see what good it'd do that saint if, instid of my workin' clothes, I got into my best Sunda clothes, an' spint the day drinkin' in Delahunt's bar-parlour. Maybe, God didn't make my mind religious enough. I'm in His hands. Of course, if I was aware that I should be in my Sunda clothes, well an' good ! though betwixt you an' me, Maureen, they're a thrial. I could niver sit with a Sunda coat at dinner, as you know, achushla, but took to it in my shirt-slaves, an', at the same time, niver rightly injyed it for fear of gravy dhroppin' on my Sunda breeches, wid yir mother's eye on me all the time."

At these recollections, he heaved a great sigh again and Maureen pressed her face against his knees.

"Dear dads," said she, "don't worry about it ; what does it matter ?"

"Well, achushla," said he, mournfully, as he stroked her soft hair. "I'd like to do the right thing by yir mother. If it's her will it's mine, the Lord be praised !"

"What's that ?"

With this startled exclamation, Maureen suddenly raised her face to the window. The trampling of feet was approaching the farm, dominated by the strains of a brass band, and, as they looked out, they saw the dark crowd flecked with many waving torches.

Closing his hand on Maureen's trembling fingers, Mr. Malone sat white and silent. The trampling came

nearer. The instruments blared louder. Under the glare of the torches, they could now see hundreds of upturned faces. Presently the foremost of the throng entered the front gate, making a passage for the bandsmen, who marched halfway towards the door, and, as soon as they had formed up, started playing again.

Maureen crouched terror-stricken against her father.

"Maureen, achushla," said he sadly, "they're only going to play to plase yir mother. They won't hurt a hair of yir head. Whist! here's yir mother come to listen."

At that moment Mrs. Malone, clad in white, came smiling down the passage and stood at the window. When the people saw her, they raised a frantic shout which drowned the band, and Mrs. Malone repeatedly bowed.

"There's a chair here, Honor," said Mr. Malone respectfully, as he rose, holding Maureen's shaking hand. "You'll find it less tiresome, sittin' while they're playin' to amuse you. Maureen, avic, it's time for you to be in bed, an' I think I'll go an' slape meself."

Taking the chair, Mrs. Malone sat bending forward with a pleased smile in full view of her admirers.

Pausing before Maureen's door, Mr. Malone, taking the girl's frightened face between his palms, kissed her in solemn silence. A tear fell on her face as he bent over her; and Maureen went to bed with an aching heart and the blare of the brass band in her ears.

CHAPTER XXI

MINISTERING ANGELS

WHEN Mr. Malone went to bed he found an unusual difficulty in getting to sleep. The drums seemed to throb in his brain even after the music had ceased. He slumbered at last, but not with his customary profoundness. Long after the band and people had dispersed he was wakened by sounds of grief from his wife's room. At first, believing these sounds part of a dream, he lay still. When they were repeated he rose on his elbow and listened. Finally he got out of bed and went to Mrs. Malone's room where, softly opening the door, he peeped in. His wife, in her nightdress, was kneeling before a little altar where two candles burned. She had her bowed face in her hands and rocked herself as she moaned:

"Glory be to God, Honor, agra," said Mr. Malone in awed tones, "what's the matter? Are you not well, achushla?"

Rising, she faced round, then sat on her bedside.

"It's about Father John I'm troubled," said she, wringing her hands. "If that cowld catches on his

chest an' we should lose him! Now, when such wonders are happenin!"

"It's two o'clock in the morn, an' have you had no slape?" said Mr. Malone, who had ventured in a step. "Sure, what good will yir cryin' an' sobbin do for the poor 'ould man? He's in the hands of God. Go to bed, achushla, an' slape."

He waited until she was in bed, when, having carefully closed the door, he went back to his own room. Once more he dropped off to slumber, and was again awakened. The early daylight glared full into the room. Hastily putting on his clothes, he went to his wife and found her pacing up and down, still undressed, wringing her hands, tears dropping down her cheeks.

"Wurra, wurra, is it still like this y'are?" exclaimed Mr. Malone, with tender reproach. "Have you had no slape at all?"

Mournfully she shook her head.

"How can I slape, an' me thinkin' of him?"

He took her hand a moment.

"Ye'r as cowld as ice, alannah," said he. "Sure yir soft heart'll be the death of you. It's broad daylight, an' you haven't had a wink of slape. The divil a step I'll lave the room till you git back to bed."

She went back, meekly enough, and he stood at the door watching her until she turned on the pillow with her face to the wall and her cheek on her hand. Then he went dolefully away to work.

All that day Mrs. Malone, when she rose and went about the house, showed signs of restless anxiety. Towards evening she went to Father John's and was followed into the kitchen by Mrs. Doran. Here she

found Mrs. Moriarty in a corner by the fire, nursing a broom.

"An' he's no better?" said Mrs. Malone, turning to Mrs. Doran as she reached the table. Mrs. Doran raised her hands and eyes.

"He took to his bed agin at ten o'clock this morn," said she; "for, sis he to me, sis he, "I don't fale aiquail to it, Mrs. Doran,' sis he, 'an' as ye'r the best hand I know,' sis he to me, 'at makin' a bowl of grool,' sis he, 'make me a bowl of grool,' sis he, 'in the evenin'. But what I want now,' sis he to me, 'is to be left alone,' sis he, 'an' not to be disthurbed,' sis he. 'I've a terrible lot on me mind, Mrs. Doran,' sis he, 'specially that schoolmasther,' sis he; 'a terrible lot on me mind,' sis he, 'as well as the cowld,' sis he to me, sis he."

"An' did you make the grool?" asked Mrs. Malone, anxiously.

Mrs. Doran pointed with a large spoon to a pot on the fire, towards which she moved as she spoke.

"I'm makin' it now, ma'am."

"An' put a good tumbler of whiskey in it," suggested Mrs. Malone.

As she stooped over the pot to stir the gruel, Mrs. Doran looked over her shoulder.

"I know what he likes, ma'am," said she, stiffly. "I've bin his thrue an' lawful housekaper for fifteen year, an' I know his likes an' dislikes."

"Sure, Mrs. Doran, ma'am," quavered Mrs. Moriarty from her corner, "there was no offince meant."

"Och, none in the world, Mrs. Doran!" said Mrs. Malone, smiling sweetly. "Sure, we all know Father John couldn't get on without you."

"Of course I know there was no offince," observed Mrs. Doran, huffily. "I didn't take any, ma'am."

There was a knock at the front door and all started, Mrs. Malone expressing the hope that the noise would not disturb the sleeper upstairs. Mrs. Doran went out to open the door, and returned with Mrs. Delahunt, whose face expressed deep and painful anxiety.

"How is he?" she asked in a trembling whisper, looking at the other women as she entered.

Mrs. Malone shook her head.

"Indeed, as bad as bad can be!" she replied. "Mrs. Doran, is the grool ready, avic? I was thinkin'," she added, turning to Mrs. Delahunt, "in case Father John was slapin' it wouldn't do to rouse him even for the grool. For there's nothin better nor a good slape, an' if Mrs. Moriarty here," facing to the little woman, who sat up suddenly, "as she's the lightest on her feet, would stale up the stairs an' listen to his breathin' ——"

"Troth, I will, ma'am," exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty, rising instantly, "that's a rale good iday!"

"But lave the broom behind," suggested Mrs. Malone as Mrs. Moriarty was stealing away.

"Sure, don't thrubble, ma'am," said Mrs. Moriarty gazing confidently back, and hugging the broom-handle to her thin breast. "Thrust me, I've carried it about since I was a girl."

After a pause, during which they heard the faint tap of Mrs. Moriarty's heels mounting the narrow stairs, Mrs. Malone and Mrs. Delahunt crept on tiptoe to the kitchen door, whilst Mrs. Doran, lifting the pot from the fire, carefully poured its contents into a large bowl on the deal table.

"Mrs. Moriarty's a good, kind little soul," whispered Mrs. Malone to her companion.

Before Mrs. Delahunt could reply there were sounds of stumbling; then a series of short screams from Mrs. Moriarty, who came rolling down the stairs after the broom, which banged its way to the feet of the startled women in the doorway. Next moment they heard Father John jumping from bed and tearing open his door. He came out on the landing.

"What's that?" he shouted down.

Mrs. Malone with Mrs. Delahunt had backed into the kitchen as Mrs. Moriarty arrived holding her hand over her right eye. Mrs. Doran, the least disturbed of all, hurried into the passage—the hot gruel dropping from the spoon which she held.

"It's only Mrs. Moriarty, yir riverence," she explained. "She stumbled on the stairs."

"What was she doin' on the stairs?" exclaimed Father John, angrily.

"Clanin' them, sir," replied Mrs. Doran, glancing over her shoulder into the kitchen where Mrs. Moriarty sat nursing her bruised head in her hands.

"An' what does she want clanin' them?" roared Father John, "whin I tould you I wanted to slape? Let me have rest an' quiet now."

He returned to his room, slamming the door. There was silence in the kitchen. Mrs. Doran continued to stir the gruel. After a while Mrs. Moriarty began tearfully to explain how the broom got between her legs at the top step, but no one listened.

"Now that he's awake," said Mrs. Malone, at length, "he'll take his grool. It'll do him a power of good."

"It's ready now," observed Mrs. Doran, who had poured some whiskey into it.

As she took up the bowl, preparing to leave, Mrs. Delahunt stepped eagerly forward.

"If you don't mind, Mrs. Doran," said she, "I'll take it to Father John. I haven't slept a wink all night thinkin' of him, an' I'd be relaved only to have a look at him."

She took the bowl and went upstairs. The other women listened. They heard Mrs. Delahunt opening Father John's door and the sound of his sitting up in bed.

"What's that?" he exclaimed.

"Yir grool, yir riverence."

They heard Mrs. Delahunt's reply, low-toned but confident.

"I don't want it! Take it away!" shouted Father John, settling down in bed again. "I won't have it; I tould Mrs. Doran I wanted rest an' slape. Away wid you, now."

They heard Mrs. Delahunt, at first gently, then tearfully, pressing him to take the bowl.

"Don't I tell you to go away!" he cried, in louder voice; "lave me in peace, me good woman!"

Then Mrs. Delahunt's footsteps were heard descending, and she entered with crestfallen face, fiercely rejecting sympathy, and deposited the bowl on the table.

"There's a power of hoarseness in his voice," observed Mrs. Malone, breaking the melancholy silence. "There's nothing for him but a mustard-plaster. Sure he won't refuse it from me."

"Of course, not from you," remarked Mrs. Delahunt, bitterly.

But Mrs. Malone had already started to prepare the plaster with the assistance of Mrs. Doran, whilst

Mrs. Moriarty moaned unnoticed. When the plaster was ready, and Mrs. Malone carried it from the kitchen, Mrs. Delahunt gazed after her with malevolent expectation, but five minutes later Mrs. Malone returned beaming.

"He let me put it on his chist!" she exclaimed, triumphantly, "an' he's dropping off to a swate slape."

Mrs. Delahunt's face became darkly suffused. She was about to make some bitter remark when there was a loud rap at the front door. All present started and stared at one another. But Mrs. Doran went out. When she opened the door she found Mr. Delahunt on the step. Back on the road there was a crowd of women, with a rare fringe of men, all gazing anxiously towards the house.

"Is Mrs. Delahunt inside?" asked Mr. Delahunt, with feverish haste.

Mrs. Doran nodded.

"Then tell her to come home at wanst!" cried Mr. Delahunt. "The boy's bin took with convulsions! Kin I see her?"

"Yis, you kin see her!" exclaimed Mrs. Delahunt, who had started, enraged, from the kitchen at the first sound of his voice, and now stood on the doorstep, from which he hastily backed. "You kin see her!" she repeated, furiously. "Here I am. You come here with lies to take me from the house of me praste. That's what you come here for!"

Mr. Delahunt attempted a protest, but his words were lost in the rising murmur and rush of the women who surged forward.

He wants to take me," cried Mrs. Delahunt,

addressing them over Mr. Delahunt's terrified face, "be foorce, from the sick house of the anointed praste!"

The women, at once, broke into the garden screaming with indignation. Whilst some furiously attacked Mr. Delahunt, others gathered under Father John's bedroom window and implored him to show himself. A sinister rumour, that Father John was at the point of death, had spread from Delahunt's bar-parlour. Mrs. Doran rushed out and, mounting the wall, implored the women to go.

"Sis his riverence to me, sis he, 'I want to be left alone,' sis he——"

But her appeal was unheeded. At length Father John threw up the window. He thrust out the upper part of his body and brandished his arms.

"Can't I git an hour's rest?" he shouted. "Can't I git a momint's peace? Can't I git a moinnt's slape?"

Many of the men on the road, unable to hear his words owing to the screaming of the women, thought that he was making a speech and loudly cheered him; whilst others, under the impression that he was blessing them, dropped on their knees and reverently uncovered their heads.

"Can't I be left in peace?" shouted Father John, furiously. "Can't I be let alone? Can't I——"

"Hooray!" roared the crowd of men. "God bless yir riverence! Long life to you, sir!"

Mr. Delahunt was, at the same time, battling in a mob of angry women, and Mrs. Doran continued to harangue the crowd from the top of the wall. Infuriated by his inability to make himself understood,

Father John, gathering the plaster from his chest, flung it frantically out. It struck Mrs. Doran on the mouth as she was pathetically exclaiming, "An' sis he to me, sis he——" She dropped as if shot into the struggling mass. Meanwhile Mrs. Delahunt shriekingly denounced her husband, and the maddened women buffeted him and tore at his face and hair until he burst away and down the road, followed by his assailants, who pelted him with mud and stones.

"I know," cried Father John, "what causes this sperrit in the parish. It's the prisence of that infidel, the schoolmasther. But," he added, shaking his fist in the air, "I'll settle wid him tomorra, afther Mass, if God spares me!"

With this outburst, he banged down the window and got into bed, where he heard the enthusiastic cheering of the men and the faint screaming of the women in the distance as they chased Mr. Delahunt towards the chapel hill.

CHAPTER XXII

MAUREEN FAINTS

NEXT day there was a crowd at the farm gates. Behind the blind, in one of the front rooms, Maureen had been seated for some time, when she saw Sergeant Mulcahy quickly enter, bolting the gate behind him. As he came down the path she hastened out to meet him. When she opened the front door he was on the step. He saluted.

"Sergeant," she exclaimed, "what do all the people want?"

"I don't think they rightly know what they want, Miss Maureen," he replied. "They're waiting to see yir mother go to Mass."

"Oh," said Maureen, "is that it? Won't you come in?"

He stepped into the hall.

"I just want to learn," he explained, "what o'clock Mrs. Malone intends to go to Mass. An' maybe you'd be kind enough to ax her if she would go out by the back an' round by the shrubbery to avoid the crowd; for, with the best intintions in the world, they might crush in on her."

"I'll run upstairs an' tell her," said Maureen. "It's very kind of you, Sergeant."

"A matther of duty," returned Sergeant Mulcahy.

He watched Maureen swiftly mounting the stairs, then, turning on his heel, marched a few paces from the door.

"Clear the gates!" he shouted.

There was a sudden move of the line of constables, and an equally sudden movement amongst the people, who stumbled hastily back. His thumbs in his belt, Sergeant Mulcahy watched these operations—the police still pushing the crowd farther and farther back—then, at the sound of Maureen's footsteps coming down the stairs, he re-entered the hall.

"Well, miss?" he observed.

Maureen gave him a shy, apologetic glance.

"Mother says," she answered, "if you don't mind, she's always gone the straight road to Mass, an' wouldn't like to change now, Sergeant."

"H'm. I thought so. Very well, Miss Maureen. I'm obliged to you. We'll have to escort her to the chapel. I suppose you're goin' with her?"

"Yes, Sergeant."

"At what hour?"

"Four o'clock Mass."

"Thank you, miss. Good-day!"

Saluting again, he wheeled round; but, as he was crossing the threshold, he felt Maureen's hand on his arm.

"Sergeant," she said in a low, trembling voice, "d'you think any harm'll happen to Misther Harrington?"

Drawing himself up, the sergeant, with a puzzled

expression, stared silently at her, as with downcast, blushing face, she looked up through her dark eyelashes.

"I don't quite understand, miss," said he; "has he ben doin' anythin' wrong?"

"Oh no! Oh no! But Father John's vexed because Misther Harrington won't bear witness to the statya, an' he says—he says——"

"Hould on a moment, miss!" exclaimed the sergeant at signs of Maureen breaking down. "I'll just step outside to have a look at the crowd."

He stepped out, stared hard at the gate, and having shouted, "Kape them back, there!" returned to the hall, closing the door over.

"You were saying, Miss," he suggested, mildly, "that Father John was vexed with Misther Harrington?"

Maureen's eyes were red, for she had taken advantage of the sergeant's absence to rub them dry with the ends of her small apron.

"Father John," she replied, "has threatened to denounce Misther Harrington from the altar."

There was a quick sound of the sergeant suddenly drawing in his breath. Catching himself by the chin, he gazed thoughtfully at the girl's shaking figure.

"Oh, Sergeant," she exclaimed, hysterically, "is there any danger?"

"Well, miss," he slowly replied, "you know as well's me that if Father John goes to that extrame there may be bad business, considerin' the excited state of the people. An' you know as well's me, Miss Maureen, that Father John is one of thim that [illegible]

be crossed, no matther who stan's in his way. I'm not goin' to express an opinion one way or the other on the pint; but it's my business to see that life's purtected, an', praste or no praste, I'll do my duty. As for Misther Harrington, I'm sorry for him, because he's a dacent, quiet young man' an' it's a pity to see him wastin' his larnin' in such a place. There's one thing, you've put me on my guard, an' that's somethin'. At four o'clock then, miss, I'll meet you an' Mrs. Malone at the gate."

Once more the sergeant's hand went to his cap and, as if his expression of opinions had implied weakness, his manner became extra-severe as he paced towards the gate, the crowd, at sight of his menacing face, backing of their own accord.

At ten minutes to four Mrs. Malóne, attired in her best black, accompanied by Maureen on one side and Jackeen on the other, issued from the front door. At sight of her there was a murmur, "Here she is!" followed by the roar of Sergeant Mulcahy, "Kape back there!" The crowd seemed to be agitated in waves. Sergeant Mulcahy himself opened the gates, but took no notice whatever of Mrs. Malone. He shouted, "Form up!" and his men surrounded the lady and her children in an ample square. Thus they proceeded along the high-road to the chapel; men raising their hats, women curtseying, and some, dropping on their knees, calling on the Saint of Carrickmachree, for the love of Heaven, to bless them!

Seeing her mother smiling as if pleased by this adulation, Maureen, as they entered the sacristy, came closer and pulled her cloak.

"Mother dear," said she, "you won't let Father John denounce Misther Harrington? Promise!"

With thoughts far distant from the schoolmaster, Mrs. Malone stared vacantly at her daughter and, making no response, passed softly in.

The chapel was crowded. The statue, in addition to the crimson canopy, was hidden in front by a curtain. After Mass a contingent of solemn men in black gowns with long white wands ranged themselves in close ranks either side of the aisle. There was an intense hush. Even Sergeant Mulcahy, standing near the door, craned his neck, holding himself more tightly by the belt. Slowly rising, Father John made a short prayer. Then advancing with grave steps, stooped a moment near the statue, and raised himself with the cord of the curtain in his hand. A sound of suppressed whispering passed through the people. Father John pulled the cord. The statue was exposed to view. At the sight strange cries arose. Some women fainted. Many others saw singular things happen: the statue, for instance, seemed alive; the wooden drapery fluttered, a halo glimmered about the head. The procession of the afflicted began. Father John had taken a seat behind the canopy with a large tin box on the table in front of him. A row of acolytes, headed by Jackeen, stood near. Hobblers on sticks, cripples on crutches, women holding moaning children to their bosoms, men with bandaged eyes—an excited, wailing throng filled the passage.

As these poor creatures passed the statue, at which they ardently gazed, gasping out wild supplications, sticks and crutches were cast aside, all such articles

being swiftly gathered by the acolytes, who piled them on the altar steps. The unhappy crowd were accompanied in their march by shrieks of adoration, hysteric cries, and ecstatic prayers from the people in the seats. Amongst the afflicted ones appeared Mrs. Moriarty, who, with every appearance of violent pain in her sides, and assisted by the stewards, was once more delivered of her agony before the starting eyes of the congregation. All those miraculously cured deposited their monetary tribute in Father John's big box. At length the procession ceased. The evening had darkened and men lit the lamps around the walls. The door at the rear was bolted.

Father John locked his box, which was carried by two acolytes into the sacristy. The stewards formed up in deep ranks to prevent pressure from those who had wildly left their seats. Mounting the steps before the altar rails, Father John raised his hands. There was instant silence.

"Dear brethrin," he began, in hoarse, vibrating tones, "an' ffiends, ye'v seen the miracles. Ye'v seen them wid yir own eyes. I thank you for yir piety an' conthributions. But I've a word to say before you go. There's a backslider in the parish."

Turning suddenly in her seat, Maureen stared reproachfully at her mother.

"A backslider, a scoffer, an' an atheist," exclaimed Father John, with increasing fury. "I dinounce him here! Standin' here, on the stips of the howly althar, I dinounce him!"

With a cry of pain, Maureen started to her feet. Her mother, dragging her down, put her hand over the [illegible]mouth.

"I dinounce Misther Harrington, the schoolmasther!" shouted Father John. "I've done with him. I wash me hands of him!"

At the first words Sergeant Mulcahy, turning on his heel, forced his way vigorously through the throng around the door. Father John's concluding words mingled with the sergeant's voice outside calling his men together. Scarcely had Father John ceased, when the people rushed for the door. Out into the open they stormed, shrieking, and in their fury they fought and struggled against one another, issuing a chaotic mob of women with battered bonnets, men in torn coats, and children crying with an unknown terror. As the people staggered out, the multitude without caught the feeling which flew from throat to throat, and flashed from one pair of frenzied eyes to another. To the schoolmaster's! The air became alive with brandished sticks. There ensued a race between the maddened mob and the police. From the rushing main body streamed away, on every side, terrified mothers dragging their children or holding them to their breasts, their dishevelled hair flying behind, their white lips agape. Maureen had rushed through the sacristy. She saw the people stooping for stones as they ran, tearing up palings, wrenching branches from the trees.

"Down wid the schoolmasther!" swept in one hoarse roar.

"In the name of God what's the matther, Miss Maureen?" asked an astonished voice beside her.

It was Larry Magee. She seized him by the arm.

"Where's Dismond?" she gasped. "They're goin to kill Misther Harrington. Where's Dismond?"

"Be japers, said Larry, "this is bad work. Wait now. I saw Misther Dismond a moment ago. Hould on. Be the God of war, I know where to find him!"

He was away. Clasping her hands, Maureen looked down the hill.

In the mad human torrent Sergeant Mulcahy and his men, who had formed across the path, had been swallowed up. Swarming over the little wall and bursting in the gate, the people rushed for the schoolmaster's house. There was the sound of stones falling like hail on the roof and windows. Maureen threw up her arms, and fell forward on her face.

When she recovered consciousness, she was on the couch in the sacristy. Father Felix, in a chair before her, was stooping anxiously towards her. Mrs. Malone, her back turned, was talking to Father John, who was at the table next the opposite wall, looking white.

"I just happened to go out when you fainted," said Father Felix, softly, "and I carried you in here. In my arms."

Maureen at once sat up.

"It is you!" she exclaimed to Father John. "It's you that has killed him! You——"

"This to your praste!" cried her mother, rushing on her.

But Father Felix was on his feet. He caught Mrs. Malone's right arm in the air.

"You wouldn't strike the poor child!" he said, reproachfully. "Sure she hasn't got her senses back yet."

Maureen, who had shrank horrified at her mother's advance, rose.

"I have my senses!" she exclaimed; "I know who has killed him." She stood before Father John, and shook her trembling hands in his face.

"Go an wid you now," said he, striking his hand heavily on the table. "Ye'v bin playin' a deep game wid the atheist. But I know how to dale wid you."

She was gone. Father Felix hurried after and caught sight of her dress fluttering half-way down the hill. The mob were raving below in the dark hollow. Suddenly, through their heavy roar, broke the keen call of the seagull. At the same moment a burst of flame shot up from the schoolmaster's house, revealing the sea of distorted faces and brandished arms. Once more, by the glare, Father Felix caught sight of Maureen flying with her hands against her ears, while flakes of fire, descending from the black air, fell all about the hill.

"Wait for me, Maureen!" he shouted.

At the gate of the farm-house stood Mr. Malone in his shirt-sleeves, his face blanched as he stared away towards the fire, seeing now and again the dark circle of people surging around it. Whilst he stood, straining his eyes, he heard a cry of "Father!" and Maureen rushed breathless into his arms. Lifting her, he faced towards the house without a word, and her head fell heavily back on his broad shoulder. From a distance Father Felix stood and watched them until they were inside the house.

CHAPTER XXIII

TIMIDITY OF FATHER JOHN

A WEEK had passed. In and out through the scorched ruins of the schoolhouse the children were playing with joyous shouts and laughter. All up the chapel hill was closely dotted with double rows of white tents, and, through the hum of the people and the laughter of children, came the quick hammering of the carpenters building booths for the sale of relics. Of the schoolmaster's house there remained nothing but the walls, the roof having fallen in. Some workmen were busy about the place with pickaxe and spade. On one of the largest mounds of smoked mortar and bricks heaped in the schoolyard, a little boy was daring a circle of his fellows to drag him down. Here, on the way to the chapel, the two clergymen paused.

"We haven't much time," observed Father John, who did not seem pleased at the sight. "He hasn't bin found yit," he added in lower tones. "Plaise God, he escaped."

"It would be a mortal pity," said the younger priest, "the unfortunate young man should have met his death in such a way."

"God knows I didn't desire the boy's death!" said Father John, fervently. "Whin I said a few words agin him I didn't mane any harm to him. All I wanted was to git him out of the disthrict; for, as I told you, his idays wer not right idays for a man of his station. But sure, I niver thought the people would snap me up so quick. It's bin a great sorra to me iver since."

"Well, please God he's safe and sound somewhere," suggested Father Felix.

"Amen," said Father John, adding with nervous impatience, "Now, I think we'd betther be goin'."

"Wait a minute," said Father Felix. "Who's that queer creature? You can see him through the window if you stand over here."

The colour fled from Father John's ruddy cheeks. With trembling hands he clutched his companion's arm and, for a moment, could not speak. He moved a little to the left as directed, and half closing his eyes, which he shaded with his hand, he saw through the gaping window a crouching figure groping with bare hands through the rubbish in a corner of what had once been the schoolmaster's kitchen. Presently Father John gave a deep sigh of relief.

"Sure, it's only that thafe of the world, Paddy O'Connor," he explained. "He's mad wid religion altogither. It takes me all me time to hould him in."

"Sure, I know him. He rings the chapel bell?" remarked Father Felix.

"Ay, troth. Sure, didn't he beg an' pray to be let do it for pure love of it. He's a quare crature, an' loves nothin' betther nor bein' in an' about the chapel

By the same token," said Father John with darkening brows, "I've bin tould it was he first set fire to the schoolmasther's house. I haven't had time to investigate the matther, now that the Bishop's comin', but if it's the truth, I'll break iv'ry bone in his yella carkiss!"

"What's the matter with him now?" asked Father Felix, laughing as he watched the man's contortions. "He seems to have found something."

Again Father John's face blanched. Paddy O'Connor came stumbling through the ruins, peering at something held in both hands. When he reached the playground he thrust the children roughly out of his path. A boy who fell against him, instantly put up his hand to protect his face, and backed away as O'Connor, following with menacing scowl, raised his foot to kick the child. But at the same instant there was a warning shout from Father John, and O'Connor, after a moment's hesitation, came lurching forward. As he approached to the road outside the broken wall, where the two clergymen were standing, he bent a knee, and pulled at his greasy cloth cap.

"What did you find in there, Paddy O'Connor?" demanded Father John, sternly.

Sidling closer, Paddy O'Connor's sickly features were contracted with a grin of triumph, which caused Father Felix to shrink with a grimace of disgust.

"If you plaise, yir reverence," exclaimed Paddy O'Connor, intensely exultant, "the schoolmasther was burnt to ashes!"

"Burnt to ashes!" repeated Father John, angrily raising his blackthorn above O'Connor's crouching

head. "You yalla baste, is that a matther to be jyful about? Have you no faylin' in you? What d'you mane, at all?"

After an upward, astonished stare, expressive of his complete inability to understand such sentiments, Paddy O'Connor bobbed his head again and pulled at his greasy cap with humility.

"If you plaise, yir riverence," said he, "I've found wan of his bones!"

With a sensation of sudden weakness, Father John recoiled.

"Good God!" he gasped, "it isn't possible! Show me what ye've found!"

With a repetition of his exulting grin, Paddy O'Connor handed a small blackened bone to Father John, who, having first put on his spectacles, took it in his trembling hand and bent close over it.

"You writched idjit!" he exclaimed, with deep relief. "That's the bone of a chicken. Out of me sight wid you!"

As he flung the bone far away, Father John, for a moment, saw himself again standing beside Maureen's basket, while Mrs. Moriarty crouched over the schoolmaster's fire. O'Connor's face, as he watched the flight of the bone, expressed deepest chagrin.

"Up wid you now to the chapel!" exclaimed Father John. "Attind to yir jooties, an' don't let me see or hear of you rootin' through thim places agin!"

"A real, bad-looking face he has," remarked Father Felix, as he looked after O'Connor, who went slouching up the hill. "I don't like him!"

He turned, walking arm-in-arm with Father John in the direction of the chapel. The hill was alive with

hundreds of people moving in and out through the tents and booths. Coming down the road was a man with his face patched all over with sticking-plaster, a handkerchief bound about his head apparently to keep his battered hat from pressing on a sore part. It was Larry Magee, who, when he saw the two clergymen approaching, looked about in a hunted way for some mode of escape, but finding none, assumed a smile of joyful but respectful greeting.

"What's this?" exclaimed Father John, pausing in front of him, whilst Larry painfully raised his hat. "Is this a walkin' hospital, or is it Misther Larry Magee?"

"It's meself, thin, if you plaise, yir riverence," said Larry, putting his hand tenderly to the sticking-plaster.

"An' have you bin shovin' yir head into a lion's cage or what have you bin doin' wid yirself?" asked Father John.

"Sure, yir riverence," explained Larry, scratching the side of his neck, "I was only wid the people whin they wor smashin' into the schoolmasther's house the night of the fire."

"Wasn't that nice work for you to be at?" exclaimed Father John, angrily. "Thryin' to injure yir fella creatures?"

For a moment Larry looked with an air of contrition on the ground, and his hand was going up to scratch his head when he recollected how painful that operation would be.

"But, yir riverence," said he in an argumentative tone, "isn't an infidel an' atheist like that betther out of the world?"

"Now, you hear him," observed Father John, turning to his companion. "That's the way min like that go to exthrames."

"Shure, yir riverence," said Larry, approaching a step and lowering his voice confidentially, "me dyin' father tould me that thim that misbelaved the Church should be desthroyed. They should be desthroyed in this world, said me dyin' father, an' they'll be desthroyed in the next."

"I haven't time now," said Father John, looking up at the chapel towards which the people were thronging, "to discuss the opinions of yir dyin' father."

"Of coorse not, yir riverence," said Larry respectfully. "But did you hear that the' schoolmasther's ghost was seen wandherin' about in the dead of the night?"

The chapel bell was ringing. Father John, who had turned away, faced back, swinging his companion by the arm round with him:

"What's this ye're talkin' about?" demanded Father John, making an effort to steady his voice. "What nonsense is this about the schoolmasther's ghost?"

"Troth, I'm only sayin' it was seen about the place beyant," answered Larry, with a motion of the hand back towards the ruins. "I thought yir riverence might have heard. Sure, me dyin' father used to say, 'Larry,' says he——"

"I don't want to hare about yir dyin' father!" exclaimed Father John, with an outburst of rage. "Or yir dyin' mother ayther. Away wid you!"

Humbly touching his plastered forehead, Larry faced about and painfully descended the hill. The clergymen proceeded to the chapel, where they had a busy

day. The afflicted sought relief in eager throngs; the money-boxes were quickly filled.

On the way home Father Felix was stepping out in the direction of the road leading past the ruins of the schoolhouse when Father John pulled him back.

"Let's go home across the hill," said he, pointing with his stick. "It's shorter, an' I'm dead bate."

They went through the lines of tents and booths, where the shouting, struggling people made respectful passage for them whenever they approached. Leaving the hill behind, they crossed a stile into a muddy lane deeply indented with ruts made by heavy cart wheels. Father Felix lifted his shining boots, with grimaces of disgust, through this place, but Father John plodded on indifferently. They entered direct into Father John's cabbage garden by a little wooden gate, and through the back door into the house. Soon after dinner they retired earlier than usual to sleep.

Father Felix, during his brief stay, slept in a small apartment which opened direct from Father John's bedroom. About one o'clock in the morning, when the dawn was just faintly whitening, he was roused by a knocking at his door, and heard a voice say—

"Are you awake?"

Father Felix sat up in bed.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

"Kin you come out t' me?" inquired the trembling voice of Father John. "Put somethin' round you, an' come out a minute."

Slipping out of bed into his dressing-gown, Father Felix, when he came out, found Father John resting in a chair beside the window in an exhausted condition.

"What's wrong with you?" asked Father Felix.

"I dunno." Father John pressed his hand heavily on his brows. "Come over here an' look out towards the schoolhouse. D'you see anythin' white roamin' about?"

He moved his legs aside as he spoke, and Father Felix, stepping to the window, pressed his face against the pane and stared out for some time in silence.

"Well?" asked Father John, anxiously.

"Sure, there's nothing there at all," answered Father Felix, cheerfully, turning round. "What did you think there was?"

"Oh, nothin', nothin'," returned Father John, wearily. "It's only dhramin' I was. Cud you find yir way downstairs an' bring up the decanther of whiskey? I feel a strange wakeness all over me."

Stepping back into his small room, Father Felix lit a candle, with which he lighted his way downstairs, presently returning with decanter and tumblers pressed against his breast. He helped Father John to some whiskey and water, then helped him into bed and tucked in the clothes.

"You might lave yir doore a bit open," suggested Father John, sighing as he settled down on the pillows. "I'd feel aisier knowin' you wor nigh."

"Of course I will. You've been overworkin'. Good-night now, and God bless you!"

With these words Father Felix stepped into his own room, taking care, before he got into bed, to leave his door ajar.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GHOST

THE two clergymen, the following evening, were preparing to leave the sacristy, when there was noise of great commotion outside the wooden palisade which had been erected around the chapel. As Father John, with Father Felix close on his heels, hurried out, the big doors of the palisade were burst open, and numbers of people rushed headlong in for shelter.

"What's the matther?" shouted Father John, as he thrust the people aside right and left.

Out in the open there was an excited crowd with hundreds more hurrying up from all distant quarters. Close at hand, where the throng was thickest, there were cries of "He's murdherin' him!" "Och, the villin!" "Will no wan pull him off the poor man? He's killin' him!"

Again Father John energetically drove the people to the right and left, and suddenly saw before him an old man stretched on the ground with another man kneeling on his chest and apparently endeavouring to strangle his victim. Around these two the people yelled and danced with excitement. Almost at the

instant that Father John saw the struggle, his blackthorn came down with a resounding whack on the shoulders of the man who was on top. This man, jumping up, disclosed the distorted, fanatical features of Paddy O'Connor, his hair about his face and the lust of murder in his eyes.

"You villin!" shouted Father John, advancing again on him with upraised stick. "You blaggard!"

"Bejaze, I heard him blastphame!" cried O'Connor, putting up his arm to guard his face as he backed. "He blastphamed the statya. If I wasn't pulled off him, bejaze, I'd have his life!"

Again and again the blackthorn came down on O'Connor's arm and shoulders until he backed away into the crowd and was lost.

"Help this poor man up!" exclaimed Father John, appealing to those around, and the old man, being raised, put his hand to his throat, staggered in the arms of his helpers and looked dazedly about.

"Who is he?" cried Father John; then, peering into the man's face, "Sure, it's Mr. O'Loughlin from Bohanabree, wan of the best Catholics from this to Cork. An' a cripple, God help him!"

"Where's my crutch?" gasped the old man; then, as some one handed him the fragments, "He's broken it!"

"Bring him into the sacristy! Here, where's Jackeen?" exclaimed Father John. "Och, there y'are, me boy!" Jackeen broke from the crowd near. "Git Misther O'Loughlin into the sacristy, Jackeen, an' let him have the best crutch in the place!"

As the people helped the cripple along, following

Jackeen's lead, Father John, raising himself on tiptoe, looked over and through the crowd in front.

"Paddy O'Connor!" he shouted, "there'll be no penance too hard for you, my man! This is fine work for the man that rings the chapel bell! Now, me friends"—to the people—"go about yir business. Be peaceable. No more fightin'. I must have peace. I want a clane record when the Bishop comes."

He turned about, and finding Father Felix close behind him, took his arm, breathing heavily and stamping his stick with rage for some time as they went through the crowd, who parted with touching of hats and curtseys.

"I told you," remarked Father Felix when they were clear, "that man had a bad face. Sure, nothing'd be too bad for him."

Father John said nothing. He stopped at intervals to draw breath and look back at the crowd, who were gradually dispersing in the direction of the booths.

"I'll dale with Paddy O'Connor," he said at length. "Lave him t'me."

Turning again, when near the edge of the hill, he had another long look at the people and the lines of booths where the lamps were already lit glaring redly on the black, moving masses of the noisy crowds.

"There's a queer sort of a death-trap there, I'm thinkin'," observed Father Felix, pointing with his umbrella along the abrupt dip of the ground where they stood, which ended in a hedge-bounded ditch.

"Thrue for you," assented Father John, looking in the direction. "It's bin on my mind often enough. Shure, whin his lardship goes I mane to have a bar-

ricade or a railin' or somethin' put along there. I'm afeard that with dhrunken people an' the like some wan'll tumble into the ditch, an' the less accidents we have the better."

When he had spoken Father John faced about for a last look, gazing up with increasing exultation at the crowds and booths and lights spread over the hill above.

"Take care!" exclaimed Father Felix, seizing him; "you're standing now on the edge of the ditch!"

"Niver mind me!" said Father John, shrugging himself free. "I know ivery inch of sod in the place. Look at it! Look there!" He held his arms aloft, his voice deepening in exultation. "To think I did it all meself! This is a proud momint an' a proud sight for an ould man like me to see. I wondher what his lardship'll think?"

"The bishop thinks you a great man entirely," said Father Felix.

"Did he say that?" exclaimed Father John, turning back towards the road and taking his companion's arm.

"In my own hearing," replied Father Felix.

"Thanks be to God for it!" said Father John. "That's grand to hear. But let the glory go to God. I'm only His insthrumint. If I work it's for the Church an' the poor sowls of me flock."

They went down towards the high-road which led homewards past the ruined schoolhouse.

"I thought," suggested Father Felix, with a touch of playfulness, "you were going to give this road a wide berth?"

"I am not!" returned Father John, stoutly, gazing defiantly towards the blackened walls which they were

nearing at every step. "I've made up my mind not to be frightened by shaddas. I'm no belaver in ghosts. An' furthermore, I'm not goin' to have any supernatheral nonsense divartin' the minds of the people from the howly statya. There won't be any ghosts in Carrickmachree as long's I'm parish praste."

With these brave words Father John, releasing his friend's arm, stamped on ahead, taking a stout grip of his blackthorn. The broad bands of light from the lines of lamps on the hill had ceased to follow them, and as they emerged from the shade on to the road the quarter moon threw faint shimmer on the begrimed walls of the ruins. The locality was deserted, for, though the children made play there in the daytime, every one fought shy of the place when darkness fell—the terror of the schoolmaster's ghost spreading abroad. Thrusting open the gate, Father John walked directly into the space that had once been the playground and halted until his companion arrived.

"There's nothin' there," said Father John, pointing to the ruins, "but bare walls. Come closer wid me an' I'll show you the inside of the schoolmasther's house with nothin' but hapes of burnt mortar on the floor."

As he approached with Father Felix a step behind there suddenly appeared at the ragged gap that once held a window a ghastly face and figure with head and shoulders shrouded in white, and this figure, gazing intently on the two clergymen, uttered a blood-curdling moan.

"All the saints in glory!" shrieked Father John. "All the powers in heaven purtict me!"

As he uttered these words he, at the same time,

turned and frantically seized Father Felix, who broke with violence away and bursting through the gate, went headlong down the road towards the main street. Without once looking back, Father John, holding his hat on, ran back up the hill with amazing agility. Here he was soon amongst human companions, but he dashed on breathless through the astonished people, who thought he had gone mad. Presently, recollecting his dignity, he dropped into a walk. Next instant a man in a booth suddenly clanged a handbell to attract customers, and Father John, jumping in fresh alarm at the sound, started wildly off again and never stopped until he was at the stile. Here he clambered over, rushed across the muddy lane, tore down the cabbage garden, and bursting through the back door met Father Felix, face to face, as the latter entered the hall from the front.

The spectre meanwhile, after a glance at the vanishing clergymen, stumbled back through the heaps of rubbish.

"If me dyin' father saw me now," it muttered, "he wouldn't belave his sinses!"

A few minutes later Larry Magee, entering the stableyard, halted near the barn, and, putting his hand to his mouth, gave a remarkable imitation of the cry of a seagull. In a short while a man came out from the barn.

"Well," asked the man, "did you find the schoolmasther's diary?"

"Truth, then, I did not, Misther O'Flaherty," answered Larry, in a jaded voice. "Here's the cloth. You kin put it back undher his head an'

tell him I've bin huntin' now for three nights an' there's no sign of it."

"That's bad news," observed Mr. O'Flaherty as he took the folded sheet. "The Jinral's mighty anxious about that diary. It has all the names of the men in it, an' he says whoever finds it has all of us at his mercy."

"Sure, it must be burnt to ashes," said Larry. "Anyhow, I'll take me solemn oath it's not there. The hands are scraped off me sarchin' for it. I kin do no more. I'm off now to the haggard to have some slape, for I've a pain in my head'd split a rock. I wish you good-night, sir."

"Good-night, Larry."

They parted, Larry stumbling his way towards the haggard, O'Flaherty re-entering the darksome barn with the sheet under his arm.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE BARN LOFT

NEXT day Larry sat in the middle of the stable-yard on the basin of the wooden pump nursing his bruised head in his hands. Beside him, his left arm in a sling, stood Desmond Malone restlessly flicking the air with a whip.

"I've bin round the whole disthrict," said Desmond bitterly, "for the past two days an' nights, without more'n two hours' slape all the time."

"An' they've all forsook us?" groaned Larry without looking up.

"All except O'Flaherty an' O'Callaghan," replied Desmond, viciously striking the whip against his right leg. "They won't come to a matin' because they're mad about this miraklis statya. I thought they were Irishmen an' patriots, but they are only Father John's dogs."

Wearily raising his hat and disclosing a strip of plaster across his forehead, Larry passed a hand tenderly over the top of his head.

"Maybe," he suggested, "the mirikle business'll all answered in a day or two, an' they'll all come back cloth. You

"Over in a day or two?" retorted Desmond, scornfully. "Sure, since they burned the schoolhouse they've set up camps all round the chapel an' booths for sellin' relics an' beads an' them things by the thousand, an' they do nothin' but drink at Delahunt's an' go to Mass an' talk of all the crutches an' miracles. Over in a day or two!"

"Whisht!" said Larry, with startled face. "There's some wan comin' through the gate beyant.

Turning quickly, Desmond saw his father with troubled brows enter the yard, Maureen on his arm.

"My God!" said Desmond, in a low voice. "Look at Maureen. The girl's a ghost!"

"It's the thought that the schoolmasther's dead that's killin' her," explained Larry, painfully rising. "God help her! She's gone to a skileton!"

"Here's a quare babby for you now!" exclaimed Mr. Malone, with affected cheerfulness as he approached. "Won't lave sight of her ould father for five minutes. Sure, isn't she a terrible babby entirely? It's 'Dads, let me go with you!' an' 'Dads, don't lave me!' as if she was afeard to be left alone wid her own mother. Sure, the divil a bit of me understan's it!"

"What is it, Maureen?" asked Desmond, tenderly taking the hand that fell at her side. "What's wrong with you, Maureen?"

She shrank at sight of his bandaged arm.

"Nothin', Dismond. You've bin away. Where were you? How is your arm?"

Giving a forced laugh, Desmond adjusted the bandage—an effort that made him wince.

"It's all right, Maureen," said he. "Sure, it's only a bit of a scratch. I only wear it like this because it

makes the girls look at me. There's Larry now. He nearly got his ugly face cut to bits. A powerful hayro is Larry! Hould up, Larry, an' let Maureen see yir handsome face."

"An' I've bin tellin' her," observed Mr. Malone, confidentially, as if there had been no interruption to his remarks, "that I'm goin' to England to git machines—for the divil a sowl I can git for the harvest——" He paused, adding helplessly, "I haven't succeeded in draggin' one man away from the miraklis chapel. So, as I was sayin', it's to England I must go to get machinery, an' on the way maybe to look up some men that don't live in a disthrict where there's a miraklis statya. An' I've tould Maureen I'll write to her iv'ry day if she likes, plaise God, though I'm not much hand at the pen."

Uttering a half-smothered cry, she clung to him.

"No, no, dads; don't lave me! don't lave me!"

Mr. Malone looked up in great distress from her strained face to the others.

"There now!" said he. "That's the way she goes on. 'Don't lave me, dads!' Sure, my darlin' child, my own darlin' Maureen"—his voice grew husky—"I'll only be away fur a couple of weeks, and I'll write——"

"Let me go with you! Let me go with you!"

"Listen to that now!" protested Mr. Malone, with tears in his eyes. "What am I to do with the poor child at all, at all? Sure, darlin'"—he bent down towards her as she pressed her face against his arm—"achushla machree, what'd you be doin' thraversin' a foreign land or batin' up recroits for the harvist? There's no one'll lay a finger on you. There now, don't cry,

mavrone. Come on. We're goin' for a bit of a walk," he explained, looking at Desmond, "across the big meddas, Maureen an' me; because, you see, the fresh air may bring back the roses to her cheeks. Come on, then, with yir ould dads, mavourneen machree!"

Pressing her hand still more tightly to his side, he turned with melancholy face away, whilst Desmond and Larry watched them in silence until they had passed out through the gates towards the big meadow. Then Larry drew in a long breath.

"By the God of war," said he, "it's killin' her, Misther Dismond. If we don't tell her the truth there'll be a wake. God forgive me for sayin' or thinkin' it! But sure, you kin see for yirself the state she's in."

"Well, then, tell her!" exclaimed Desmond. "If her heart goes that way, well"—slapping his leg with his whip—"I'm for freedom for women as well's men. Tell her, then, in God's name, Larry, for I must be off, an' I leave the matter in your hands. How's he gettin' on?"

As he spoke he glanced across the yard towards the loft above the barn, Larry looking in the same direction.

"Sure, he was first-rate this mornin'," answered Larry. "He's comin' round. Another day or two an' he'll be able to walk about as well as iver."

"Then tell her!" exclaimed Desmond again. "I won't stan' in the way. To see her like that! Tell her, Larry, an' take care the matter's kept quiet, for you know as well's me if Father John gets the scent——"

Facing about Larry winked with an effort which

made him, next instant, seize his face in both hands.

"Thrust me!" said he, between his fingers. "I'm not an omadhaun."

"Sure, I niver thought you were," returned Desmond, impatiently. "But what I was goin' to say is, that you mustn't let father get an inklin' of the matter, because——"

"Of coorse not!" said Larry, looking up with animation. "Sure, haven't I kept it from him all along? An' it's only this mornin' he wanted to go into the barn, an' I had to swear I'd mislaid the kay. But now he's goin' to England, plaise the pigs, he mayn't want the door opened."

"Will you hould your whisht!" exclaimed Desmond, turning angrily on him.

Larry stood a moment dumfoundered, then dropped his head in his hands again.

"I was goin' to say, when you broke in with yir long tongue," explained Desmond, "that I couldn't rely on father blurtin' it all out to mother without manin' any harm."

"Of coorse he wouldn't mane any harm," said Larry. "Sure, any wan that knows him——"

"Isn't it enough," broke in Desmond, "for me to spake? Wait a moment. I'll have a look at him myself."

Facing to the barn loft again, he put a hand to his mouth, uttering the seagull wail in low pitch. Presently, over the half-door of the left, appeared the face and powerful bust of O'Flaherty.

"How's he?" inquired Desmond, approaching.

O'Flaherty shook his head.

"I'll come up," said Desmond.

Mounting the stone steps, he paused midway to look back. He saw Larry following.

"Stay where y'are!" exclaimed Desmond, imperiously.

Larry slunk back to his seat on the pump basin. O'Flaherty unbolted the half-door, Desmond stooping as he entered the loft. Here, in the corner, on some sacks surrounded with straw, lay Martin Harrington. At the noise of Desmond's entrance he had raised himself on his elbow to stare a moment, but fell back helpless. Desmond looked down at him in silence. Martin, smiling, raised a thin hand for welcome, then, glancing sideways at a tumbler on the floor, his lips moved. Kneeling, O'Flaherty gently raised the bandaged head, supporting him with one knee while he held the glass to his lips. Having drunk, Martin thanked his nurse with a silent look as he was laid carefully back again.

"How are you?" asked Desmond. "Any better?"

"Yes, thanks," replied the schoolmaster, very feebly.

He was evidently in pain, and repeatedly raised his hand to his head, closing his eyes.

"That's right!" said Desmond, cheerfully. "You'll have to rouse yourself a bit. But you'll pull all right in a day or two."

Retiring to the opposite side of the loft he beckoned to O'Flaherty, speaking to him in a low tone, then returned to the schoolmaster.

"I'm goin' to take yir nurse away," said he. "But I think you'll be able to get on without him for an hour or two. He'll be back agin, an' maybe you'd better try and have a slape."

For sign of adieu he bent and touched the hand lying on the blanket, and Martin, smiling faintly, turned his face to the whitewashed wall.

"Come, O'Flaherty!" said Desmond, briskly.

Larry Magee rose painfully from his seat as the two young men arrived in the yard. When passing, Desmond glanced at him over his shoulder.

"Mind what I tould you," said he.

Saluting, military fashion, Larry stood stiffly at attention until the others went out through the gate.

CHAPTER XXVI

ACROSS THE SUNLIT HILLS

BY and by Larry, who had sat down again to nurse his throbbing head, heard voices approaching from the direction of the haggard. Turning, with a grimace of pain, he saw Mr. Malone and Maureen, who still clung to her father's arm. The big farmer seemed dejected; his head, usually held high and well back, drooped forward. Larry remained seated until they had passed, and were already a few paces from the wash-house door. Then he stood up.

"I beg pardin, Miss Maureen," he called, with a hand to the side of his mouth.

They stopped, and, still holding on to her father, Maureen looked back, whilst Mr. Malone glanced we[illegible]up at the barred back-windows of the house. Larry came nearer by a step or two.

"I beg pardon, Miss Maureen," he repeated apologetically. "Might I spake a word wid you?"

"Come back, dads," said Maureen, striving to force him round.

With a sigh Mr. Malone wheeled about.

"What is it, Larry?" asked Maureen.

Larry perplexedly rubbed his chin, that being the only part of his face devoid of sticking-plaster.

"Well, miss," he explained, "if I might say a word in private widout any offince, sir," he hastily added, as Mr. Malone looked curiously towards him. "It's only a kind of a sort of a message from Misther Dismond."

He attempted to convey to her by the expression of his eyes that it was absolutely necessary to speak with her alone, but the immediate result was to distort his patched face so painfully, that he desisted. Holding himself by the chin and opening his mouth, he stared helplessly at her. Glancing up into her father's face, she took her hand from his arm and Mr. Malone shook himself with an air of relief.

"Don't go far, dads!" she pleaded.

"No, my girl," he replied, "I'll wait for you in or about the door."

She went to Larry, who began to walk slowly back to the pump.

"Would you excuse me sittin' down, miss?" he observed, with an exaggerated expression of pain, "I'm not feelin' very well." He sat down while he spoke, holding his hands tightly against his sides, as if doubtful about the condition of his ribs.

She remained close by, her brows troubled, her hands loosely in the pockets of her jacket. When he had, with some difficulty, settled himself on the stone basin—at the same time furtively noting the movements of Mr. Malone, who presently moved near the wash-house—he looked steadily up.

"Miss Maureen," said he, "I've got me ordhers from the Jinral. Misther Dismond says, says he, 'Ye'v to tell her all, Larry,' says he, 'bekase it may relave her

mind,' says he. 'I command you!' says he. An' that's enough for me, miss."

"Yes, Larry, but what is it?"

Glancing hastily over her shoulder towards her father, she saw him examining a broken pane, touching the glass here and there carefully with the tips of his fingers. She turned to Larry.

"Be quick," said she, "an' tell me."

"I'm to tell you, miss, somethin'," returned Larry slowly, "about the night of the fire——"

"No, no, not that!"

Throwing up her hands she clasped them over her face and turned from him.

"Wait a momint, miss," he exclaimed, "I'm bound to tell you or I'll git the head knocked off me, though, by the same token, it's not worth kickin' about the yard at the prisent momint. Now, miss, unless you want to have me kilt entirely, ye'll have to listen. Thim's his ordhers an' no man dare disobey them. Now, miss, whin you lay for two days afther the fire, in yir bed, talkin' like in yir slape, you thought the poor schoolmasther was dead an' gone. But, miss, you wor mistaken."

For a moment she gazed speechlessly at him; then suddenly sat down near him on the pump basin, and caught breath.

"Larry," she whispered, "go on—quick!"

First of all Larry observed that Mr. Malone had, at length, disappeared into the house. Crossing his legs with a sense of ease, he turned respectfully towards Maureen.

"I've got me ordhers, miss, to tell you iv'rything, an' iv'rything I'll tell you. When my poor ould father

was dyin', 'Larry, my boy,' says he, 'niver tell a lie,' says he, 'laste of all to Miss Maureen,' says he, 'for she loves childher,' says he, 'and thim that loves childher,' says me dyin' father, 'hates liars,' says he. That's God's truth, miss, an' divil a lie in it!"

"Oh; Larry, tell me—about Mister Harrington!"

"'Me dyin' father,' says he, 'tell no lies, Larry, me boy, an' ye'll git on in the world'; an' the sorra lie I've tould from that day to this. The people, miss, would have made mincemate of the schoolmasther, for they swept away the polis as if they wor no more nor a lot of babbies, an' they set fire to the schoolhouse—— Miss! You must listen if you don't want Misther Dismond to kick me into the middle of next wake. You wor two days in bed afther that, an' all the time the black walls wor still smokin'. Well, miss, I don't want to make you suffer more by talkin' of that. But they reckoned without the Jinral, an' shure, miss, if ye'll remimber, I ran afther him an' you might have heard the saygulls. Now, Miss Maureen, what I tell you's for yirself alone, an' yir father's not to hare a word of it until Misther Dismond gives his ordhers. An' if you don't promise me that you won't say a word to man, woman, or child about it, the divil another word'll cross my lips."

"Larry, I promise! I promise!"

Catching him by the sleeve, she looked up earnest into his face, and Larry, sitting back a little, cleared his throat.

"Thank you, miss. Now my mind's at aise, thanks be to God! though there's a hole in the top of my skull batin' the divil's tattoo all the time I'm spakin'." Raising his hat, he tenderly groped about his head a

moment. "An' as I was sayin'," he resumed, "the Jinral had us all together in solid ranks in five minutes. Aw, but he's the boy with the brains, miss, for fightin'. The divil a lie in it. A born Jinral, sure enough! An' to see the eyes of him like fire all the time an' his voice could an' clare; bedad, there's no batin' him. Well, miss, it wud have bin madness for us to face that crowd of divils wid murdher in their hearts, an' we without arms in our hands, so my brave Misther Dismond he rushed round to the back an' he threw out a rear guard, miss, an' sent the rest of us to break down the doors an' windas. An' sure, we found the schoolmasther, more dead nor alive, an' he gropin' with his hands agin the wall lookin' for the door in the dark an' smoke, God help him! For it was dark an' blind with the black smoke, inside, Miss Maureen, though the flames wor bright enough outside. But as I was sayin', the schoolmasther couldn't see an inch forninst him, an' was goin' the wrong way intirely. It was Misther O'Flaherty an' Misther O'Callaghan, miss, that carried out the schoolmasther an' we formed a solid square round them an' niver left them till they wor safe out of danger. An' all the time we wor round at the back, if the stones an' bricks didn't come down on us like a storm of hail. An' that's how Mi[redacted]Dismond got his arm hurt an' Misther O'Callaghan lies dyin', at the prisent momint, in the hospital at Bohanabree!"

"Dyin', Larry?"

She sprang up, trembling, pressing her hands together. Larry shook his head.

"Hit by a stone, miss, in the back of the head. He dropped like a log of timber an' niver spoke. A fine

young man like that, miss, the sowl of honour, both he an' Misther O' Flaherty, an' only twinty years of age! An' when he dropped, I took his place an' helped to carry the schoolmaster all the way."

"All the way?" cried Maureen, wildly. "All the way where?"

Quickly rising, Larry looked fearfully about; then, approaching Maureen, he bent close to her.

"Whisht! For the love of God, whisht!" said he. "D'you see the loft beyant over the barn, miss?"

With bosom heaving, Maureen excitedly turned, following with eager eyes Larry's pointing finger.

"There, up thim stone steps, miss? The schoolmasther's lyin' there safe an' sound."

"Oh," gasped Maureen, "Thank God! Thank God!"

"Well, yis, miss," observed Larry, "Thank God, right enough, but thank the Jinral, too, an' the boys that did what he tould them. But as for goin' up there now, miss, ye'll excuse me," he added, catching hold of her dress as she started to run across to the barn steps, "it's not to be thought of. Stan' quiet, miss, a minute, if you plase. It's this way, miss, the schoolmasther doesn't know where he is. No, miss," he continued, shaking his head at her astonished look. 'He talks in his slape like as if he wor home wid his mother an' sisters, an' tells them not to be [illegible]ned about him, that he's all right an' the like of that quare kind of wandherin', miss, though sometimes he's right enough. But we haven't tould him where he is for fear of disturbin' him in his mind. He's bin cared for by Misther O'Flaherty, that's more like a weman with him than a sthrong lump of a man, an' sits up all night widout bite or sup. You kin see the school-

masther by an' by, miss, whin the Jinral gives the ordher."

She seized both his hands, while he looked solemnly at her.

"Larry, dear Larry, how good of you to tell me!"

"Jinral's orders," observed Larry, shrugging his shoulders. "But yir to remimber yir promise, miss. It's all a saycrit. The schoolmasther's to be kept quiet. Quiet, miss—you undherstand?"

She seemed to pay no attention to these words. Dropping his hands, she faced round and stood gazing with rapt expression towards the half-door of the barn loft. Rubbing his chin a while, Larry stared at the back of her head, then walked to the stables to finish his day's work.

Two hours later, in the gathering dusk, Mr. Malone entered the yard alone. As he was passing toward the haggard he observed something moving near the barn steps. He halted, went on a pace or two, and, turning back, advanced to the barn.

"Why, Maureen!" he exclaimed. "The Lord save an' purtect us! Is this where y'are, out in the cowld yard at this hour?"

"It's all right, dads. Is it cowld? I didn't know."

Coming closer he peered fearfully into her face.

"[illegible]reen, asthore," said he, piteously. "It's time for you to be thinkin' of goin' to bed. Come now, avic, and I'll see you as far's the door."

She took his arm and he noticed that she did not lean on him. She threw a swift glance over her shoulder at the darkening barn-loft as she went brightly on.

When he left her, he went, with troubled mind,

resume his work, and to find that all the farm hands, save Larry Magee, were loafing about the town. The moon had risen when he returned. As he approached the house through the yard, he heard singing. Close to the pump he paused, raising his face, convulsed with an expression of terror, towards Maureen's bedroom window.

"Maureen!" he called.

She did not seem to hear him. Seated at the open window she was gazing towards the moonlit barn and singing, "Across the sunlit hills, mavrone!"

With sinking heart Mr. Malone stood there listening to the weird old song for some moments, then walked quickly forward.

"Maureen," he called again, "is that you? For God's sake, darlint child, won't you go to yir bed?"

She bent down and smiled at him.

"I will, dads!" she exclaimed.

She laughed lightly as she closed the window. Before the end of the first verse she had seen, over the half-door of the barn-loft, the pale, wondering face of Martin Harrington.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. MALONE PUZZLED

MR. MALONE was out again at dawn spending most of the day from home. When he returned he observed that the barn door was slightly open, and close beside it he saw Larry Magee in his shirt-sleeves striking a match against the stonework. Covering the heel of his pipe with his right hand, Larry was absorbed in pulling hard for the smoke, and was startled to find the master so close upon him.

"Hullo, Larry," said Mr. Malone, pointing, "you found the key of the barn door? I'll have a look inside."

Larry hastily stepped in front of him.

"Beg pardon, sir," said he, "I think it'd be betther, if you don't mind, to have a look at Bridget, the white ma[illegible]m thinkin' it's broken in the wind she is."

He waved his pipe excitedly towards the row of stables on the opposite side. Mr. Malone stared heavily at him.

"Begor," said the farmer, "ye'r a square object, wid all that stickin'-plasther on yir ugly face. Well, I'll look at the mare in a moment. I'll just step in here——"

Larry placed a hand on his master's arm.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I'm undher ordhers. The Jinral——"

"Out of my way, you leprahaun!" shouted Mr. Malone. "How dare you stan' foreninst me?"

Moving aside, Larry pulled hard at his pipe a moment with his head down; then, suddenly darting across the yard and wheeling round by the pump, he disappeared through the haggard gate. Meanwhile, Mr. Malone, who had entered the barn, shading his eyes with his hand, stood dumfoundered. On a form near the ladder that led up to the loft sat his daughter. Beside her, with bandaged head, was Martin Harrington. Mr. Malone staggered back.

"Be the powers of Moll Kelly!" he exclaimed. "Is this the schoolmasther, safe an' sound, that I see? Or am I dhramin' an' lookin' at a ghost?"

Coming forward, he seized Martin's hand.

"By all the goats in Gorey," he cried, "it is the schoolmasther!"

"Oh, dads," exclaimed Maureen, "you're squazin' his hand too tight!"

Dropping the hand, Mr. Malone stepped back for another view.

"Safe an' sound!" said he. "Bedad, it's meself's glad to see you, schoolmasther. An' they [illegible] me ye'd bin kilt an' buried a wake ago! An' how are you? Where have you bin an' how did you come here, at all, at all?"

Maureen put her hand gently on Martin's mouth, as he was about to reply.

"Dads," said she, "don't ask him now, please. He's far from strong. Sure I know all about it, an' I'll tell

you by an' by. But don't worry him. Doesn't he look bad?"

"Troth, ye'r right, Maureen," said her father, "it'd be cruel to bother him, an' I'll say nothin'. But surely, me poor fella, ye'r not goin' to spend yir life up there in the loft, for I see the hay stickin' to you. Hadn't you better come into the house an' slape in a dacent bed like a Christian?"

"No, no, dads," said Maureen, who was holding Martin's hand. "He's afeard——"

"Afeard of what, chicken?"

"Of Father John," explained Maureen, warningly. "An' you're not to say a word yourself!"

"Aw, the divil a word!" said her father.

At that moment O'Flaherty put his head through the opening at the top of the ladder.

"The half-hour's up!" he said, hoarsely.

At this interruption Mr. Malone, stepping backward, stared up with fresh astonishment.

"Is that yirself, Misther O'Flaherty? Shure the top of the mornin' to you! Or is it evenin'?" Thrusting back his hat, he grasped his forehead. "Am I in a hospital, or where am I?"

Rising, Martin Harrington struggled up the ladder, O'Flaherty reaching down to assist him, and just before he disappeared he turned to say "Goodbye." Then Maureen, taking her father by the arm, led him

"Isn't it grand that he's alive an' gettin' better!" she exclaimed as they crossed the yard.

"The divil a bit of me belaves it at all!" exclaimed Mr. Malone. "I'm in me bed fast aslape, an' I had too many hard-biled eggs for supper. Wait a moment.

The light breaks in on me." He put his hand to his brow. "I see it all now. Maureen walkin' up an' down, last night, an' singin' at the winda. Aw, but she's the sly, decavin' girl to her poor ould dads. It's the divil looks afther the women, shure enough."

Bending forward, she glanced up at him through the tops of her eyes, smiled, and laid her face caressingly against his shoulder.

"Don't be hard on your little Maureen, dads!"

"There you go," said he, "wid yir blarney an' palaver. But what puzzles an' sarcumvints me is, that a fine, purty girl like you should take up wid a poor, wake thing like the schoolmasther. Is it the wakeness an' starveness of the cratur stirs the mother in you, avic? Sure, he's not a patch on that sthrappin' young fella, O'Flaherty, or that other fine specimen of manhood, Misther O'Callaghan. An' you give them the go by for—— Well, I won't say any more," he added, as he received a warning squeeze of the arm. "But as for that infernal thafe of the world, Larry Magee!"—he paused to stare about the empty yard—"wid his white mare an' her wind broke! Be me sowl, I'll break the wind of him when I ketch him. The Jinral, too! This is some of Dismond's nonsense. Playin' at sojers an' not a hand put to the harvist. Well, praises be to God, I'll be off to Eng[illegible]in a day or two. I suppose you don't mind me goin' no[illegible] Maureen?"

"But, dads, you must write every day all the same?"

"Bedad, I will. An' I'm glad ye'r not afeard to stay at home wid yir mother. What turnin' have you takin' agin' her of late, agra, an' you wor always the best of friends! Has she done anythin' to you?"

He was holding open the door of the wash-house, which led to the kitchen. She started, buf did not speak. As she passed him she looked up at him and smiled, then threw her arms about his neck, kissed him, and ran into the house.

When they were gone, Larry came softly through the haggard gateway, glancing cautiously about. Keeping close to the wall, he made his way into the barn and looked up towards the loft.

"Are you all right, Misther O'Flaherty?" he called.

"Yes, Larry, all right!" answered O'Flaherty above.

Stepping lightly out, Larry locked the door, putting the key in his pocket. Seating himself on the pump basin, he began to whittle a stick with his knife, whistling softly to himself. He heard a step and saw Jackeen quite close.

"Is there anythin' up there, Larry?" asked Jackeen, pointing to the barn-loft.

Larry looked towards the stables and at the back windows of the house and shook his head.

"Up there?" explained Jackeen, still pointing. "Anythin' goin' on?"

"Goin' on where, sir?" asked Larry, respectfully.

"In the barn-loft?" said Jackeen, watching him narrowly.

Bending forward, Larry slowly chipped the stick, and there was a spell of silence.

"There's a lot of ould hay up there," he said, slowly.

"But I thought I heard noises," observed Jackeen.

"Well, sir," returned Larry, laboriously polite, "I

may as well tell you the truth. I got a prisent of a dog the other day, an' he's mad. I'm kapin' him up there an' givin' him medicine."

"A mad dog! Sure it was men's voices I heard."

"Aw, not at all, sir," said Larry. "It was the dog that I was spakin' to. He was thyrin' to break the chain an' foamin' at the mouth. For God's sake, sir, don't go nixt or nigh him. He'd tear the inside out of you, an' what'd yir mother say to me, thin? Sure it's poor Larry'd git all the blame."

"Oh, I won't go near him," said Jackeen. "Not me!"

"Thank you, sir," said Larry.

He watched Jackeen until the boy had left the yard; then, with a puzzled expression, nursed his head in his hands. He had not pondered long, however, when Maureen came out from the kitchen, bearing a tray covered with a clean white cloth, and called to him. Giving him the tray, which she had carried with some difficulty, she told him it was for Mr. Harrington, and having waited until he had entered the barn, she gave a long wistful look at the loft before returning. Larry laid down the tray at the bottom of the ladder and looked up.

"Are you there, Misther O'Flaherty?" he called. "Come down, if you plaise, sir; there's someth. here for you."

Putting his head through the opening, O'Flaherty frowned down at him.

"Bad cess to yir big throat," said he. "Is that any way to come shoutin' an' the schoolmasther just dhroppin' off to a nice slape?"

"I'm rale sorry, sir," returned Larry. "But Miss Maureen tould me to hurry; and bedad, I hope ye'll take it away at wanst, for the smell of it makes me hungry."

Descending, O'Flaherty took the tray and bore it aloft. Martin Harrington, roused by the voices, was lying awake in the corner, the blanket across his legs.

"I've somethin' good for you here," observed O'Flaherty, placing the tray on the floor. "Wait till I git a light."

Taking a lantern from its place on the wall, he lit it, resting it on a stone behind the couch.

"It won't shine in yir eyes there," he remarked, "an' it'll give light for the tay."

Sitting up, Martin watched him as he put a door over the opening in the floor and drew an old piece of sacking across the window. When the cloth was taken off the tray they saw a teapot, two cups and saucers, a plate piled with toast, and two dishes of rashers and fried eggs. O'Flaherty rubbed his hands.

"Bedad, there's enough for both of us!" he exclaimed, "a rale square male. Wait till I prop you up a bit."

He thrust an old box with a sack of straw for pillow behind Martin's shoulders and helped him to sit up.

"You're too good to me," remarked Martin, with emotion. "An' I feel I don't deserve it. You must have suffered cruelly this day."

O'Flaherty, kneeling beside the tray, was setting the covers aside. He looked up.

"You mane about Maureen?" said he, "I'll be straight with you now. I did suffer more'n iver I suffered since I was born. But I kep sayin' to myself, 'He's Maureen's choice.'" Pausing a moment, he added gently, "That settles it. Ye'r Maureen's choice."

Although the lantern was behind him, Martin placed his hand over his eyes as if the light was too strong.

"It all gives pain to me," said he, brokenly. "More than I can describe."

"Ther's no use in worryin' about it," returned O'Flaherty on his knees, pouring out the tea. "It's all over now an' done with. In any case, I'm clane out of it. An' I'll tell you the raison. I paid a flyin' visit to the hospital yestherda an' I saw Jim—Jim O'Callaghan." Putting down the pot, he looked away towards the darkest corner of the loft. "I saw Jim, an' he smiled at me an' he says to me, he says, 'Jack,' he says, 'I'm going to my long home,' he says, 'an' now the road's clear for you with Maureen.' He meant it well, but it stabbed me to the heart. An' I bent down to him an' says I, 'Jim,' says I, 'ye've bin sthruck by the hand of God, an' d'you think,' says I, 'I'm goin' to take advantage of that,' says I, 'd'you think I'm a mane cur like that, Jim?' says I. 'Well, [illegible]n,'" O'Flaherty's strong voice broke and he turned mot fully to Martin, "then says he, 'Jack, we had many a stiff fight, you an' me,' says he, 'on the first of iv'ry month,' says he, 'but there'll be no more firsts of the month for me, iver again,' says he. 'Stoop down an' kiss me, Jack,' says he, an' I stooped down," stammered O'Flaherty, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand,

"an' I kissed him." There was a long silence. "An' now," he added, "I'll help you to the tay an' rashers, but I don't feel aiqual to atin' anythin' myself just at prisent. If you don't mind, I'll step down an' have a bit of a smoke in the barn."

CHAPTER XXVIII

CLEVER JACKEEN

IT had been an exciting day for the two clergymen. The throng of the afflicted past the statue had been greater than ever, and, after it was over, Father John went out to the hill and addressed the people there, standing on a table. On the way home they were escorted by cheering crowds to the gate. Following close on the heels of Father John, Father Felix, as he entered the priest's sitting-room, took off his hat, flung back his coat and emitted his breath with a prolonged whizz.

"Praises be to God!" he exclaimed. "This has been a day and a half. And it's yourself must be the proud man this day, Father John!"

Father John sank back in his big armchair too exhausted either to take off his hat or unwind his muffler; but, with his fat hands resting tremblingly on the arms of the chair, breathed thick and fast for some minutes.

"Don't spake t'me, avic!" he gasped. "Fill me out a stiff jorum of whiskey. The praise an' glory belong to God an' the Church."

"Well said, well said!" exclaimed Father Felix,

actively crossing the room to the cabinet. "That's really a splendid thing for you to say, Father John, and I'll remember it. Yes, I'll remember it."

As he spoke, he found decanter and glasses with the assistance of Mrs. Doran, who, having opened the front door for them, had followed silently into the room.

Taking the tumbler from the hands of the younger priest, Father John helped himself liberally. Then he closed his eyes and sank back, his fingers round the glass which rested on his thigh. Standing at the other side of the table, Father Felix helped himself before drawing a chair round to sit opposite his friend. Mrs. Doran moved restlessly about, arranging glasses and listening to the roar of the crowd without.

"The glory belongs to God and the Church. I say it with all due reverence," observed Father Felix. "But you're the instrument. Never to my dying hour can I forget this wonderful day. It's a miracle in itself, and it's a miracle how you got through it. But you've been sustained by the power of the Almighty, and I'm glad to see your cold is better."

"It's bad enough still on me chist," remarked Father John, lifting the glass to his lips. "I wondher how Mrs. Malone got home?"

"She was iscorted home by the polis, yir riverence," observed Mrs. Doran, with a respectful curtsey, "for the people wanted to tear the clothes off her back to kape for relics."

Slowly Father John turned his eyes on Mrs. Doran's meek face.

"Thank you, ma'am," said he, "for the information. But, now, I want to spake a word or two to Father

Faylix, an', though I know you to be a discrate an' pious woman, there are some things ye'r not to listen to. Be off wid you now an' git us somethin' hot to ate."

Reverently curtseying again, Mrs. Doran went silently away. There was a pause, during which Father Felix, finding a box of matches, lit a cigar.

"Has she gone?" whispered Father John, his eyes closed, his head reclining on the back of the chair.

Taking the cigar from his lips, Father Felix looked smilingly round the room.

"In troth, she has."

"She's a good, kind sowl," observed Father John, "but I niver tell her anythin', for I'm afeard she's a terrible gossip. You might just step to the doore an' see if she's outside, for she has a wakeness for listenin' at the keyhole, especially whin Mrs. Malone is wid me."

Stepping on tiptoe to the door, Father Felix opened it quickly and heard the patter of Mrs. Doran's slippers as she hurried down the passage leading to the kitchen. Closing the door, he resumed his seat.

"You mentioned Mrs. Malone," said he slowly smoking as he gazed absently into the grate. "What are you going to do with the daughter?"

Father John opened his eyes.

"Wid Maureen?" said he.

Father Felix nodding, bent forward to rub the ashes off the cigar against the top bar of the grate.

"I dunno," replied Father John. "What should I do?"

"It seems to me," observed Father Felix, "that it would be a pity the daughter of that pious woman should be galavanting about the world, maybe bringin'

disgrace on herself and the parish, when she should be in Tranquilla."

At these words, calmly and even coldly uttered, Father John sat up, grasping the sides of the chair.

"Is it make a nun of a tomboy like Maureen?" said he.

"Well, I only throw out the suggestion," observed Father Felix, dreamily gazing at the cigar which he held out between his fingers, "in the interests of the parish and the girl herself."

Father John sank restfully back.

"I couldn't think of that wild crature," said he, "put up in a convent. But, maybe, there's somethin' in what you say."

"Ay, maybe you might turn it over in your mind by and by," suggested Father Felix, adding more briskly, "And what are you going to do about the church?"

"About the church?" repeated Father John vacantly.

"Yes. Of course you're not goin' to be satisfied with that shanty any more. How are you goin' to accommodate the thousands of people that will come to you from this time forth? Isn't the fame of the place goin' now to the four corners of the earth? Sure, you'll have to build a new church whither you like it or not."

"Ay, I've thought of that in a sort of a way," observed Father John. "The money'll come fast enough. It's pourin' in already. But the land—that's what perplixes me."

"Doesn't Mister Malone own a power of land about here?" asked Father Felix.

"Troth, in a sense, he does. But it's Mrs. Malone owns the best part in her own right——"

Breaking off, Father John sat up and remained rigid, staring hard at the younger priest, who smiled amicably on him.

"That'll do now!" exclaimed Father John, with renewed energy. "Say no more. Father Faylix, ye'r a young man, but ye'v sinse enough for a Bishop."

"Oh! not at all," said Father Felix, modestly. "But sure I was thinkin' she'd never give the land."

"An' why not!" asked Father John.

"Well," answered Father Felix, looking critically at the end of his cigar. "There's her son an' her daughter, Maureen, maybe she'd be thinkin' of. What's that?" he added, turning round quickly towards the door.

It was Mrs. Doran who entered with white face, nervously fingering at her apron.

"Yir riverence, if you plase," she exclaimed, "the people are pourin' into the front garden an' thramplin' down all the flowers, an' there they are callin' for you——"

"I won't go out! Not another word will I spake to-day!" shouted Father John, vigorously beating a hand on the chair. "Father Faylix, go out an' sind them about their business. Say I'm behouldin' to them for their kindness, but that I'm dead bate."

Throwing the half-smoked cigar into the grate, and pausing a moment at the table to take a mouthful of whiskey-and-water, Father Felix went out. He stood on the front step in face of an enthusiastic crowd.

"My friends," he exclaimed, raising his elegant white hand to still the cheers, "Father John has asked me to say that he's too weak to say a word. He thanks you all from the bottom of his heart, and says that the glory belongs to God and the Church. That's a great

saying to take home with you and ponder on. The glory belongs to God and the Church. Now, my friends, leave your good old priest in peace. He's worked hard, night and day, not for himself but for his flock. God bless you all! Go home now quietly, and let no one enter here again to-night."

There were shouts of "Long live Father John!" "Hurroo for Father Faylix!" and some one called for a cheer for "The good nuns of Tranquilla!" which was heartily given.

As Father Felix, having blessed the people with upraised hand, re-entered the hall and was about to close the door, some one sped past him. It was Jackeen, who hurried into the room to Father John.

"Are you aslape, Father?" he whispered, breathlessly.

"Wha—what is it? Is it you, Jackeen?" said Father John, opening his eyes. "What is it, my son?"

"I've found him!" said Jackeen, excitedly.

"Found who, my boy? Take yir breath. Close over the doore, Father Faylix," said Father John, sitting expectantly up. "Who have you found, Jackeen?"

"The schoolmaster!" replied Jackeen.

Father John rose but sat down again, and remained staring fixedly at the youth's thin face, which was flushed with excitement.

"Hould on now, Jackeen. Where did you find him? Take yir time. This," said Father John turning his head towards Father Felix as he proudly pointed to Jackeen, "is the rale praste of the parish. I'm proud of him. I thrained him from a babby. Go on, me bowld son!"

"I heard voices in the barn," explained Jackeen, rapidly, "these two days past, an' when Larry Magee was out of the yard, I went into the stables an' gev the signal that I've heard them give, an' Misther O'Flaherty looked over the doore of the loft, an' I heard the schoolmaster's voice talkin' to him behind."

"Didn't I say he was a rale threasure!" exclaimed Father John. "God bless you, me son! This takes a great weight off me mind. Thank God he's alive an' well, though he must lave the parish. But I'll slape better to-night to know he's alive an' well. I wouldn't have the guilt of blood on Carrickmachree for a thousand pound. Go on, my son."

"That's all," said Jackeen. "Mother called me in an' I had to go away. But the schoolmaster's hid up in the loft, right enough."

"An' that's a great dale to know," said Father John. "You may go now, Jackeen, as I want to spake to Father Faylix. Go, an' God bless you!"

Bending down on one knee, Jackeen reverently took the blessing, Father John resting his hand on the youth's head, and as Jackeen passed out Father Felix, who had been standing all the time beside the table, nodded approvingly at him.

"This," observed Father Felix, "is a serious matter."

"I'm mortial glad that young man wasn't kilt," said Father John; then, looking up at the young priest's grave face, added, "How d'you mane saripus, avic? Come an' sit down here in yir chair an' smoke yir cigar. How d'you mane sarious?"

"Maureen and he," observed Father Felix as he obeyed, "will be together now with stolen interviews·

and I don't know what. Of course it doesn't concern me in a way, but you'll have to look to it."

There was a long silence, and Father John looked hard at the grate. Then he struck his fist resolutely on the arm of the chair.

"Hand me the whiskey," said he, nodding towards the table. "It consarns me. Ye'r right, as ye'r always right. It consarns me, sure enough. You mintioned Tranquilla, an' to Tranquilla she'll go! for the girl's a good girl, an' I'd like to have her in a place where she'd be safe from harm."

Father Felix said nothing, but, when he had helped the whiskey, smiled as he lit a fresh cigar.

CHAPTER XXIX

TREASON FELONY

MR. MALONE was away in England. Desmond had taken O'Flaherty to make preparations for the impending Insurrection. Larry Magee was busy polishing a set of harness. His right foot rested on the pump basin, the harness across his knee. He was softly whistling "The Boys of Wexford," and held up a buckle to the light, when Jackeen quietly approached from the wash-house gateway.

"What are you doin', Larry?" asked Jackeen.

"Workin'," replied Larry.

"What are you workin' at, Larry?" asked Jackeen, after a pause.

"Harness," answered Larry.

"Yes, I know it's harness," said Jackeen, "but——"

"Oh, you know it's harness," interrupted Larry. "That's quare now. I thought you knew so much about incense an' wax candles that you wouldn't know such a common thing as harness."

Whilst they were speaking Father John had come up through the haggard, and, keeping close to the wall until he came to the barn, flung open the door.

"Is that where you are?" shouted Father John.

"Have I found yiz out at last? Come out ow a' that now! Come out now, this minute!"

Immediately Maureen and Martin Harrington, who had been seated within, came forth, hand in hand, Father John backing a pace to let them out.

"Let go that man's hand!" exclaimed Father John. "Isn't this a nice thing, for the daughter of a howly woman to be kinoodlin' in a barn with an atheist an' a heretic? Don't you know he was dinounced? Inside!" he roared, pointing his blackthorn towards the house. "Inside, at wanst! Ye'll consecrate yir varginity in the proper quarther. Inside now, an' if I iver hear tell of you convarsin' wid this heretic, I'll put you outside the pale of the Mother Church!"

Maureen, whose face had become as pale as Martin's, cast a look of terror on her lover.

"Inside!" repeated Father John, furiously. "How dar you disobey me!"

Stepping forward, she held out her hand to Martin, but Father John, rushing between them, threw up his arms, which he held aloft.

"Am I to curse you for iver, amin?" he demanded. "If you worn't the daughter of Honor Malone ye'd be lost from this momint for all etarnity! Away wid you!"

Silently, and with bent head, she walked slowly away towards the house, Father John watching her until she reached the door, where she turned to look back at Martin. Then, when she was gone, Father John, wheeling about, shook his stick close to the schoolmaster's face; whilst Larry, having thrown down the harness in a heap on the cobbled stones, came forward with his mouth open.

"As for you, Misther Schoolmasther," shouted Father John, "I know you now, me fine fella. But ye'll not ruin Maureen Malone so long's I'm parish praste of Carrickmachree."

The blood left Martin's lips, and his weak hands worked feverishly at his sides.

"That's a cruel, infamous lie!" he protested.

Taking a short grip of the blackthorn, and spitting on the palm of his hand, Father John raised the stick over the schoolmaster's bandaged head.

"What's that?" he cried. "D'you give the lie to a praste?"

"Arra, father jule!" exclaimed Larry, hurrying between them, "sure, you wouldn't mind him. He doesn't know what he's sayin'. His mind's asthray, yir riverence."

"Oh, you're there, Judas, are you?" said Father John, turning on him. "I'll dale wid you too."

"Why, father, avic, what have I done?" asked Larry, aghast.

"What have you done?" retorted Father John. "What have you done? D'you mane to brazen it out to me face? I know what ye'v done. I know who you take yir orders from. But I'll be even with you an' yir masther, Jinral Dismond Malone, before ye'r many days ouldher. I know what ye'v done an' what ye'r doin', me fine fella."

"Lord save us, an' all the saints in glory!" exclaimed Larry, with intense fervour. "Listen to that from the anointed an' respected praste of the parish! See what ye'v brought on me, Misther Harrington," he added, turning to Martin with sorrowful indignation. "Where did you come from, in the name of God? Or what brought you here at all, at all?"

"It won't do, me young friend," said Father John to Larry. "Ye'r too late now to play the omadhaun. I've bin watchin' you for some time, an' I'll settle wid you in joo course. As for you, Misther Schoolmasther," turning with increased anger to Martin, "I give you warnin' to git out of this disthrict before twinty-four hours. I dismiss you now varbally from yir post. Ye'r a disgrace to any parish, an' God forbid you should iver have the tachin' an' thrainin' of innocent childher. But ye'll niver have it if I kin help it, for I'll make my report to the proper quarter. I give you twinty-four hours now, an' don't let me know of yir darin' to spake or approach Maureen Malone. Where are you, Jackeen?"

From the shadow of the pump, where he had remained, a silent listener, Jackeen stepped quickly forward.

"Come wid me, me child," said Father John. "I want you, an' I wouldn't lave you in the company of them pair of villains for all the gowld in the bank. Come wid me, me sainted child."

Catching Martin, who staggered back with his hand to his face, Larry, taking his arm, assisted him to a seat on the stone steps of the barn loft, whilst Father John, with his left hand on Jackeen's thin shoulder, stumped out of the yard, his long upper lip pressing out the lower, his eyes vanishing to pin points under his heavy brows.

Outside on the high-road, the people, as fast as they recognised the old priest, came hurrying towards him, with prayers and blessings, doffing their hats and curtseying. But Father John, barely glancing at them, waved them impatiently aside, and they made a clear

way, but still followed with bare heads showering blessings on him. When they approached the beginning of the town he saw Sergeant Mulcahy, to whom he beckoned.

"Run, Jackeen, my child," said Father John, "to Mrs. Doran an' tell her to git some rashers an' eggs an' a cup of sthrong tay as fast as she can, for I'm wake wid me righteous wrath. Sergeant, ye're the very man I wanted to see. I've somethin' important to say to you."

"I'm very glad to be of sarvice to your reverence," returned Sergeant Mulcahy, falling slowly into step.

Jackeen had run on ahead; Father John stamped his stick heavily on the ground.

"The spiritool care of this parish, Sergeant Mulcahy," said he, "is a heavy burden on ould showlders."

They had arrived within full view of the chapel hill with its crowd of white tents, marquees, and wooden huts, and Sergeant Mulcahy raised his eyes towards the multitude of devotees.

"An' growin' heavier iv'ry day, yir riverence," he remarked, nodding at the animated spectacle.

"It's only the goodness of God in His marcy," observed Father John, "that kapes me goin'. I'd gladly lay down my burden if I consulted my own aise, but while I kin set wan foot before another I mane to kape my flock above reproach. An' high traison's a thing I'm not goin' to tolerate as long's I'm parish praste of Carrickmachree."

"Stan' back, there!" exclaimed the sergeant, turning on the crowding people. "Can't you let his reverence

walk in peace to his home? High traison, sir?" he added, quietly.

Father John glanced heavily aside at him in anger.

"Ay, high traison. Look now, Sergeant Mulcahy, there's many things a parish praste has to do at the call of jooty that goes agin' his grain. An', maybe, you, too, in yir own line, have had jooties to perform that wint agin you. An' for the sake of his family it's a crool jooty for me to report Dismond Malone for conspirin' agin' the Government. That's a matther that'd come betther from you nor me, for, I've no doubt you know somethin' about it, maybe more'n I do meself."

Taking his hands from behind his back, the Sergeant placed his thumbs in his belt. He was silent for a moment or two, gravely regarding the ground; and Father John watched him acutely.

"Of coorse," said the Sergeant at length, "I knew there was somethin' goin' on, but I took it only for schoolboy nonsense. It's nayther more nor less than that, your reverence; an' with due respect to you, sir, it would be a terrible thing to bring ruin an' misfortune on a respectable family for the foolishness of a young man, when, if there's no notice taken, he'll grow out of it in time."

Halting at his gate, Father John faced about, sternly regarding his companion; while the people were only kept from pressing close by sheer terror of the sergeant's menacing eyes.

"Am I to undherstand, Sergeant Mulcahy," said Father John, "that you consider high traison a schoolboy offince? Is that what I'm to undherstand?

"As to what you understand, your reverence,

observed the sergeant with respectful firmness, "that's a matter that I wouldn't presume to dictate to you about. But you may take it from me, that if there's any fear of sarious disturbance, I would make it my business to see to it. I think, your reverence, I've bin long enough in the force to know my duty."

"You have," assented Father John; "I'm not sayin' a word agin you, Sergeant. Many's the time have I reported favourably of you to your supayriours. But, I'll make bould to say, that you don't know half what's goin' on here in regard to designs of ribellion. An' I ax you, as a sinsible man, d'you think I'm goin' to sit idle an' see me spiritool plans knocked to smithereens by Dismond Malone or any one else? Let me tell you now, that I've evidence of a very sarious state of things. If ye'll come up to me in an hour or two, whin I git a rest an' a bit of somethin' to ate, I'll show you documentary evidence, nothin' less nor a diary kept by Dismond's private secretary, that'll open yir eyes."

"D'you mane Misther Harrington?" observed the sergeant, coolly. "To my knowledge he was only once at their headquarters, an' he regretted it."

"Ay," said Father John, with some surprise, "I mane that atheist and heretic. That's the man. I see you know more'n I thought. But it sames to me, Sergeant, ye'r very lukewarm in the matther. But if you won't take it in hand yirself nor help yirself to promotion, I know who to write to in the Castle without your help."

"Your reverence," said the sergeant, "as regards promotion, it's quite out of my idays at my time of life. But with due respect to you, I know my duty

an' I'll do it when I'm called upon. 'I'll call up an' see your documents."

"Now that's right!" said Father John. "Now ye'r talkin' like a sinsible man. In an hour or so then I'll expect you."

Father John opened the little gate and entered. Sergeant Mulcahy saluted, and, as he turned on his heel to pace to the barrack, the people backed hurriedly out of the way, for there was a very dangerous gleam in his steel-grey eyes.

CHAPTER XXX

THE WARRANT

MAUREEN was startled one day to see several gentlemen arrive on the farm with Father John, and commence surveying operations. Next day and for many days the same thing happened. Workmen followed. Foundations were dug in the big meadow and in the adjoining cornfield. Maureen feared to approach her mother of late, and rarely saw her. Mrs. Malone had been besieged at home by sick and maimed persons, desiring to be cured. This became so troublesome, that Father John publicly announced that Mrs. Malone would sit in his house for two hours every day for the cure of diseases. Hence, between visiting the chapel and attending at Father John's, she was seldom at home. But Maureen soon learned from the talk of the farm servants and others the meaning of the surveying and trench digging. A new chapel of immense dimensions and a new priest's house were to be built. And the work, starting soon, went on rapidly.

Several new roads were made from the main thoroughfare across the farm to the scene of operations, and all day long men with carts and waggons

went to and fro. A bewildering mass of scaffolding began to ascend and huge cranes arrived. The workmen built themselves an entire village of wooden huts with corrugated iron roofs. Soon work started at night as well as by day, and the scaffolding, all night long, was alive and resounding with busy men hammering and pounding by the light of hundreds of lanterns and great iron braziers full of flaming coals. The strangeness of these sights always attracted crowds of spectators. Later on, a large number of foreign workmen, French and Italian, arrived, adding to the profound excitement of the inhabitants. At first the people, particularly the girls, were shy of these dark-faced men with their loose blouses, wide trousers, and strange languages. But the foreigners proved, on the whole, so genial, and so quickly made friends with the children, that they became popular. On Sunday, when work was suspended, the foreign workmen roamed in bands from ten to twenty, accompanied by accordion players, and sang choruses followed by admiring crowds. At first, bewildered by the sudden transformation of the old, familiar scenes, Maureen seldom left the house, except to steal at dusk down to the haggard to see Martin Harrington and to bring him his meals, which she privately prepared herself, being afraid to trust her secret to any of the people save Larry. Desmond was away on one of his mysterious excursions, and Maureen waited with ever-increasing anxiety for his return. One day, as she was speeding across the stable-yard with Martin's dinner tied up in a cloth, one of the kitchen maids ran out from the back door, screaming—

"Are you there, Miss Maureen?"

Turning back affrighted, Maureen met the girl half-way, and strove to hide the dinner behind her back.

"Miss Maureen," said the girl, "Sergeant Mulcahy's here an' wants to see yir mother, an' I tould him yir mother's out, healin' the poor cratures at Father John's, an' thin he axed if he could see you, miss."

"Where is he?" asked Maureen.

"He's standin' in the hall, miss, wid his han's behind his back, an' looks crool wicked. I hope nothin's wrong!"

"Oh, there's nothin' wrong," said Maureen, with affected composure. "Run in an' tell him I'm comin'."

When the girl sped back, Maureen hurried into the washhouse, where she secreted Martin's dinner on a low shelf. She returned to the house and found that the sergeant had transferred himself to the sitting-room, where he stood gazing through the window at the two constables whom he had placed either side of the front gate. Hearing Maureen's step, he turned round to face the doorway.

"I'm sorry to hear your mother's out, Miss Maureen," said he.

"She's up at Father John's," said Maureen. "Is it anythin' I can do?"

Placing the tips of his fingers to his lips in an embarrassed manner, he stared with knit brows at the floor. When he looked up his grey eyes had grown sad.

"Miss Maureen," he said, slowly, "I'm here on a most unpleasant duty, for I've known you an' yir family

now for many an' many a year. 'But," he caught himself, as if with an effort, by the collar, "there's many an unpleasant duty a man in my position is foorced into, an' I can say that in the whole coorse of me career I've niver had a more displeasin' task than this."

Alarmed by these ominous words, Maureen clasped her hands. Her thoughts fled to the unhappy youth lying alone in one of the haggard sheds. She gazed helplessly at the sergeant. He, who had turned aside to glance out of the window, saw her agitation when he faced about again.

"For God's sake, Miss Maureen," he exclaimed, "don't go off in a faint. If you do I'm afeard it'll be all up with yir brother——"

Maureen, who had staggered back with one hand doubled against her side, suddenly revived as he stepped towards her. Desmond, she felt certain, was able to take care of himself.

"Brother?" she repeated in surprise.

"Whisht, Miss Maureen!"

The sergeant's finger was at his lips; stepping to the door, he looked up and down the hall. This done, he turned his back to the door holding the handle behind him and faced Maureen.

"Is yir brother at home?" he whispered.

"N—no, I don't think so. He's away shooting, I think, for he often goes away like that."

The sergeant gave a deep sigh of relief and placed a hand firmly on her soft arm.

"Miss Maureen," said he, with deep feeling, "yir brother Dismond 's a very foolish young man. Many's the time I've given him a hint of what he was drivin',

to, but sure I might as well be talkin' to a stone wall. In the pride of his heart, he only laughed at me. But now it has come at last. I have in my breast-pocket here a warrant for his arrest——"

"Good God, for what?" cried Maureen.

"For treason felony," replied the sargeant, regretfully. "God knows, it was not my seekin', though I knew all about him all along."

Sinking down in a chair Maureen, putting her hands over her face, bent forward, weeping; and the sergeant, after a miserable look at her, stepped to the window to stare sternly at the two constables.

"He'll be ruined!" sobbed Maureen. "He'll be put in jail. Sure, Sergeant." Jumping up, she approached him with outstretched hands. "You wouldn't arrest Dismond, you that has always bin so good an' kind to us—don't say you'd do that, Sergeant!"

Slowly wheeling about, he took her hands in his.

"Miss Maureen," he said, "it wasn't me that gave information. I'm too ould now to go an' blast a brave young life like his, because he likes the myst'ry an' adventures of saycrit sissieties. May them that informed on him have it on their sowls to their dyin' day! But now, Miss Maureen, what's the use of cryin? Maybe you can help him to kape out of prison. Anyhow, I must go up an' sarch his room for documents, if you'll be plased to show me the way."

Wrenching her hands from him, Maureen drew herself proudly up.

"Come, then," said she, "since you'll do this dirty work, come, an' I'll show you my brother's room. Though it's not Sergeant Mulcahy I ever thought would descend to ruin us."

She started on in front, the sergeant slowly following up the stairs with bent head.

"There!" said Maureen, throwing open the bedroom door. "That's Dismond's room."

"Miss Maureen," observed the sergeant, pausing before he entered, "I understand complately how you feel in this matter. But whativer you say to me in the sorra an' bitterness of yir heart, I'm goin to forget! All I ask you is, to stan' there while I have a look round."

Walking quickly into the room he opened the wardrobe and looked into it. Then, pulling out the drawer of a large chest, he drew forth a new green uniform having golden epaulettes, cocked hat with white feathers. He carried these articles hurriedly to the doorway where Maureen stood with folded arms, her lips curled in scorn.

"Miss Maureen," he whispered, "for God's sake, take these away an' hide them in yir own room or somewhere. It might be the ruin of him."

She took the clothes, looking at them in deep astonishment, and, crossing the landing, thrust them into her own wardrobe. When she returned the sergeant was standing outside her brother's room, a bundle of papers in his hand.

"Miss Maureen," said he, "I've done my duty. Now do you do yours."

"Mine? What d'you mane?"

She recoiled from him, in fear of another terrible revelation. He went down a step or two of the stairs, glanced over the bannisters into the hall, then looked up at her.

"I've seen Larry Magee," said he, in a low voice,

"sated out in the yard. There's no man can quicker find yir brother. You might mention to him that traison felony means anythin' up to twenty years' paynal sarvitude. Good evening, miss."

He saluted and went downstairs. She only waited to hear the front door closed. Seated on the pump basin, his back against the pump, Larry was enjoying a meditative pipe, when he caught sight of Maureen's fluttering frock.

"There's a warrant out for Dismond's arrest!" she gasped. "Sergeant Mulcahy's just gone. He sarched through the room."

Grasping the bowl of his pipe in the hollow of his hand, Larry, slowly rising, scratched his chin as he looked at her excited face.

"A warrant out for Misther Dismond's arrist?" he repeated. "What's he done, miss, if it's not an onconvanient question?"

"He's bin doin' traison felony, I think the sergeant called it."

Opening his mouth, Larry held himself by the chin.

"Aw!" said he; then, after a pause, "I wouldn't be too excited over it, miss."

"But they want to arrest him an' put him in prison. Isn't that enough to excite any one?" exclaimed Maureen, with some indignation.

"Not the mortial taste in the world miss," observed Larry, reassuringly. "With joo respict, miss, they're not going to lock up Misther Dismond. They've to ketch him first. Me dyin' father used to say——"

"Oh, Larry," exclaimed Maureen, clasping her hands, "don't mind your dyin' father, now——"

"Of coorse," said Larry in an aggrieved tone, "I

don't want to spake of him if it goes agin you. But there was niver a thrace of harm in him to man, woman, or child!"

"Larry, achushla," said Maureen, coaxingly, "don't be vexed with me, I didn't mean to say anything to hurt you!"

"Vexed is it?" said Larry, with bright surprise. "Arra, go on wid you, Miss Maureen. Vexed with you! Be the powers, I'd be a quare ould curmudgeon to be vexed with Miss Maureen. As me dyin'——"

Suddenly clapping a hand over his mouth, he gazed apologetically at her; but she was too troubled to notice his emotions.

"Hadn't you better go now an' find Dismond?" she asked.

Knocking the ashes out of his pipe against his palm, he put the pipe into his pocket, settled his cap and pulled the lappets of his jacket briskly forward.

"I'm off now," said he.

"Are you going through the Haggard?" inquired Maureen with hesitating air.

"Ay, that's the shortest way, miss."

"Just wait a moment, Larry."

She ran back into the washhouse, quickly returning with the schoolmaster's dinner in the napkin. When she handed him the bundle, he looked curiously at it.

"You might give that to Mister Harrington," said she, bashfully. "It's his dinner."

"Ay. Yis, of coorse. The schoolmasther's dinner!" Larry looked up brightly. "Of coorse, miss, I'll lave it as I pass."

"And oh, be sure, tell Dismond"—she placed a hand

on his arm as he was about to turn—"for his sake an' mine an' poor dad's not to get himself arrested!"

Larry, who had been staring at the ground, looked at her steadily.

"Be aisy, miss," said he, "about Misther Dismond. The polisman isn't born yit that 'll lay a hand on him. An' I'll bid you goodbye now, miss. Ye'll have to look afther the schoolmasther all by yirself now, miss, if ye'll be so kind. But thank God! he's gettin' on finely!"

"Why Larry," she exclaimed, shrinking surprised from his outstretched hand, "won't you come back?".

"Miss Maureen," said Larry, pointing solemnly at the back of the house, "d'you see the ivy there crawlin' up the wall? Well, miss, it doesn't stick closer to them stones than Larry Magee'll stick to Misther Dismond; through thick an' thin, through storm an' shine. Goodbye, miss!"

She clasped his hand in silence, and, as he started away, looked after him with dimmed eyes. When she re-entered the house she met her mother coming through the hall with shawl and bonnet on. Mrs. Malone's fair face was flushed.

"Oh, mother, you heard the news already!" exclaimed Maureen, starting back.

"Of coorse I have, my child!" returned Mrs. Malone, pausing at the foot of the stairs to look with astonishment at her daughter. "Sure, hasn't all the world heard it! Isn't that why I dunno, this moment, whether I'm on my head or my heels! The Bishop's comin' next wake, an' Father John's just towld me he'll stay here with us. Sure, it's a great honour entirely. We'll have to get the house in order at once an' I'm

just goin' up to see if I can't put his lardship in your bedroom. You can slape with me. An' be the same token, there's a power of things, underclothin' an' the like, I've bin missin' this long while."

"The Bishop!" gasped Maureen, holding on to the bannisters. "Not that, not that, mother! About Dismond! The pollis are after him for traison felony!"

Sitting down on the steps Mrs. Malone began to untie her bonnet, then to wring her hands.

"Ochone, ochone!" she wailed. "Is Dismond in trouble again? Sure I niver knew him to be out of hot water since the day he was born! An' now, when I have the Bishop on my back, this terrible trouble must come on me!"

"Mother, I can't help it!" said Maureen, crying.

"Of coorse, child, I know you can't help it," said Mrs. Malone gently.

Rising, she paused a moment, then, ascending several steps, paused again.

"I'll spake to his lardship about it," said she, sighing as she looked round at Maureen's sad, upturned face. "Sure, he has great influence with the Governmint. An' now that I think of it," she added, with sudden brightness, "sure the Bishop can have Dismond's room. That lifts a great weight off my mind!"

As she went upstairs she took off bonnet and shawl, whilst Maureen, sinking down on the lowest step, buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE DITCH

THE Bishop arrived. Accompanied by his private secretary, he drove in a closed carriage to Father John's. The town, decorated with flags and evergreens, was thronged more than usual, and his lordship was cheered along the main street, hundreds running beside the carriage to catch a glimpse of the illustrious visitor. He stayed a long time indoors with Father John. A draped and festooned platform had been erected in front of Mr. Delahunt's shop, Father John having promised Mrs. Delahunt that he would endeavour to persuade his lordship to address the people from that place. Mr. Delahunt, sent out on the Bishop's arrival, hovered for hours on the outskirts of the crowd around Father John's dwelling. Towards dusk the carriage drove up again; his lordship came out, followed by a dozen or so of priests, and mounted the seat, while the coachman stood at the horse's head.

"My friends, my good friends," said he, after the cheering and waving of a host of hats, "I'm only going to say a few words at present. It's giving me great pleasure to come to your town, which has been so

specially signalled by Divine favour, and to spend a few pleasant hours with your respected parish priest. Now, many of you, I've no doubt, are electors for the West Division of the county, and I'd like to say a few words specially to them. Mister O'Halloran's a fair and straight opponent. I haven't a word to say against him. But I mean to vote myself for Mister O'Hara, an honest publican and tenant farmer. Mister O'Hara is bound to vote for a decent measure of land reform. Now that the settlement of the land question is looming on the horizon, why not vote for the candidate that's pledged to compulsory purchase? Now, I want to say this to you: there's a number of persons recently going about preaching Socialism to the labourers. Now, I want to see the labourers decently housed and comfortable; but, I say, you've got to settle the land question first of all; and them that's trying to raise up Socialism in the land—telling the labourers that they have as good a right to the soil as the farmers and landlords—I say, they are doing bad work in Ireland. That's all I'll say to you now to turn over in your minds, and I'm very pleased to be amongst you all."

Amidst a fresh burst of cheering and waving of hats the Bishop got down, and, entering the carriage with his secretary and Father John, drove straight away towards the chapel.

In a confused state of mind, Mr. Delahunt, having put on his hat, feeling uncomfortably hot, and as if his mouth was half full of dust, returned to the shop, which had been temporarily emptied during the speech, but was now rapidly gorged with thirsty customers. Having hung up his coat in the office,

Mr. Delahunt went behind the counter in his shirt-sleeves.

"He's a great man!" exclaimed one customer.

"You may well say that!" said another. "A wonderful head!"

"I'm a voter for Wist Division," observed a man, striking his fist on the counter. "An' I'll give me vote to O'Hara. His lardship's word's good enough for me!"

"He hit thim Socialists mighty hard," remarked another man, staring at Mr. Delahunt for approbation.

Resting his folded arms on the counter, Mr. Delahunt gravely shook his head.

"The English people," said he, "with all their faults, 'll do the right thing whin they see it. That's what his lardship conveyed to my mind. If they're goin' to lend us the money to buy out the lan'lords an' give the land to the farmers, what'll they say whin the Socialists come up an' say the labourers have as good a claim as any wan else? That's the pint his lardship conveyed to my mind. The English people'll say, 'the Irish never know what they want. Wan day it's the farmers, the nixt the labourers!' That's the pint his lardship——"

"Pathrick!"

Turning pale, Mr. Delahunt glanced with hunted expression over his shoulder; then slowly began to raise the lid of the counter to let himself out, the customers backing.

"Pathrick!" came again more sharply from above.

Mr. Delahunt abruptly let the lid slap down, called out, "I'm comin'!" and hurried up the stairs at the

back of the shop. On the landing, opposite the door of the baby's bedroom, he found his wife, attired in her best black with bonnet and black gloves.

"Will the Bishop soon come?" she asked, at the same time, looking down with surprise at her husband's shirt-sleeves as he toiled up the stairs.

"He's gone!" he replied.

"Gone!" gasped Mrs. Delahunt, who had been buttoning the last button of her new gloves. "Gone!" she repeated, backing against the wall.

"He dhruv away to the chapel," explained Mr. Delahunt, depressed and respectful, "five minutes ago."

"An' didn't you see Father John?" exclaimed his wife, recovering a little. "Father John that promised me he'd get his lardship to spake from our platform?"

Holding himself by the chin, Mr. Delahunt sorrowfully shook his head.

"I couldn't git within fifty yards of him," he answered, apologetically.

"No, of course you couldn't!" cried Mrs. Delahunt, through her clenched teeth, her eyes blazing so menacingly, that he retreated several steps. "Of coorse you couldn't! You niver could! An' you niver did as long 's I've known you! That is what you git for neglectin' your religion."

Turning round, Mr. Delahunt weakly made a feint of listening to some noise in the shop below.

"For absentin' yourself from confession an' neglectin' your prayers!" exclaimed Mrs. Delahunt.

"But I've bin very religious of late," said Mr. Delahunt, looking up appealingly.

"You have!" she retorted, angrily nodding her

bonnet at him. "Because it pays you. I know you, and Father John knows you. But it's Mrs. Malone's doin' too. I warrant she got round him an' wouldn't let him come, for her heart's full of jealousy an' pride. Wants ev'rything for herself. The world wouldn't satisfy the vanity of that woman. Now, we're done for. There's nothin' more now. After me puttin' up the platform an' all. That's the kind of husband I have!"

As she uttered these words in a furious voice, she banged the baby's door open and entered, while Mr. Delahunt, with a gasp of relief, sped downwards into the shop.

Meanwhile, the Bishop was making an attentive study of the interior of the little chapel on the hill, and Father John, as soon as he had finished his labours as guide, begged permission to return home on important business for a brief space. The important business was the arrival of Mrs. Malone, for whom he impatiently waited, pacing up and down the room and hall, sometimes going to the front door and gazing impatiently up the road. He had returned to the window of the room, and was angrily tapping the panes with his fingers, when he saw a commotion of people without. There was a rush towards the gate, or, rather, a race between some people and the police. The latter succeeded in drawing a line across the gate, and Father John, hurrying to the door, saw Mrs. Malone, hot, smiling feebly, and bedraggled, escorted by a double row of constables, who protected her from the strenuous attentions of an excited crowd.

Presently the escort halted, and made a passage, through which Mrs. Malone ran, arriving breathless

in the hall, and almost falling into Father John's arms.

"Sure, what in the world kept you!" he exclaimed, closing the door behind her.

Resting her back against the wall, she stood panting, her best lace shawl torn, her bonnet with the jet trimmings damaged; and she placed her hands on her heaving bosom, unable to speak for several moments, whilst the crowd roared without. Father John, who was dressed in new silk hat and overcoat, at length took her hand and led her into the room.

"Och, father, avic," she panted, "I thought I'd never raitch you. No sooner did I set foot outside when the people crowded round me. Look at the state of me!"

"Sit down there," said Father John, "an' dhraw yir breath a momint. We're kapin' his lardship all this time, but you must have a momint to dhraw yir breath."

Sitting down, she placed both hands on her knees, bent forward, and breathed quickly. Going over to the window, and holding the blind aside, Father John could still see, in the gathering darkness, the road crowded with men resting their hands on the shoulders of those in front, and rising on tiptoe to gaze at the house, while the gate was still held in force by the police.

"I'm that flurried an' worried," said Mrs. Malone, "I don't know what to do. I had a letter this morn from the Hospital nurse over in England, an' she says Dinnis won't be up for a fortnight or more."

Dropping the curtain, Father John faced round.

"There's the hand of God in all this," said he.

"Have you got yir breath? Ye'll have to take a glass of wine."

She raised her hand in protest.

"Not a drop, father avic," said she. "Sure, I'm flurried and hurried enough without drink that would go to my head."

Father John, having already poured some wine from a decanter, approached her, holding out the glass.

"Ye'll have to take it," he said, firmly. "It'll settle yir narves. Remember, ye'v to mate the Bishop in a few minutes."

"How will I iver mate him!" said she, taking the glass. "Sure, I'll drop with narvousness. An' what'll my husband think at all about——"

"About what?" asked Father John, as she paused to finish the wine.

"About Maureen," she replied, stretching to place the glass on the table. "Sure, Father, I'm afeard what he'll think. I'm afeard——"

"Let me hear no more of this!" exclaimed Father John. "Yir daughter'll be taken from shame an' thrubble, an' prepared for heaven. She's bin matin' that atheist an' heretic in the backyard afther dark, an' I ax you, as a sinsible woman, d'you think an atheist an' heretic like that'd spare her innocence? What'd her father think, whin he comes back an' finds the shame on her? Let him thank God that she's safe where her sowl'll be saved."

As he stood near her, she seized his hand between hers, and looked up at him, with tears streaming down her cheeks.

"I couldn't face him all alone!" she said. "Father John, you must be with me. I couldn't do it by myself.

I know it's the best, but, father avic, it'll be hard to make him look at it in that light."

"That'll do now," said Father John, decisively. "If he doesn't see it in its proper light, God'll help him by an' by. Let yir mind be aisy now. Ye've other things to do now. Ye've bin singled out to be a light to the world. It's the hand of God; would you go agin it? Hould on now, no more cryin'. The Bishop has bin spakin' a great dale about you, an', whisht now, listen to this: he's going to write to His Holiness about you."

"Och, father avic, all this glory's takin' the life out of me!" said Mrs. Malone, putting her hand on her bosom. "I don't know what to think of it. But sure, you'll made me right, for you know how wake I am. Let me go to Mrs. Doran a moment, to settle my bonnet an' shawl, for what would his lardship think of me in this rig?"

"Ay, go, but don't be long," said Father John. "We mustn't kape his lardship any longer. An'"—he went to the door as she hurried out, raising his voice—"get Mrs. Doran to lend you an owld cloak, so as the people won't know you."

He returned to walk up and down the room impatiently, sometimes looking out of the window, sometimes going into the hall. At last Mrs. Malone appeared, enveloped in a cloak with a hood which was pulled low down over her eyes, almost hiding her face. She had washed the traces of tears from her face, and smiled feebly at Father John, who at once led her down the hall towards the back door, Mrs. Doran respectfully following.

"I'm goin' to take you out this way," he explained,

as he opened the door; "there's a crowd still waitin' for you at the front gate. But we've kept his lardship long enough. Come now, take me arm."

They went together through the cabbage garden, Mrs. Doran watching them from the back door, whilst, to express her admiration, she put her head on one side, and washed her hands round and round in her apron.

A muddy, narrow lane led from the garden towards the hill, and Mrs. Malone had to clamber over a stile. Once out on the hill, she kept closer to Father John. Before them was spread a town of tents, booths, and wooden shops, lit with lanterns, naphtha-lamps, and candles. From the noisy multitude rose an incessant noise; through the roar cut the yells of the hawkers: "Buy the life an' advintures of the Saint of Carrickmachree!" "Porthrait of the Saint of Carrickmachree —only sixpinse!" "The wondherful mirikles of the miraklis statya wid the life of Honor Malone, the Saint of Carrickmachree!"

As Father John, with his companion, entered amongst these crowds, one vendor after another thrust their booklets and pictures towards Mrs. Malone's hooded face, shouting, "Here, ma'am's, the life of the Saint of Carrickmachree!" She pressed closer to him, sometimes whispering, with a catch of the breath, "Och, father avic, my head's turnin' round. Will we soon raitch the chapel?" The whole hill was alive up to the wooden barricades of the chapel, and the air sickened with the odour of the naphtha-lamps.

Father John sternly plodded on his way, half dragging Mrs. Malone along with him, until at length they

reached the barricade. Here they were swiftly admitted by the robed stewards. They made their way quickly into the sacristy, where Mrs. Malone, as soon as she had entered, was overcome with surprise and confusion. The lights seemed to dance and whirl before her. From a row of priests standing around the wall, the face of handsome Father Felix smiled on her and vanished several times, and she heard Father John saying, close to her ear—

"Yir lardship, this is Mrs. Malone."

Both her hands were seized by a small, stout man with a good-humoured face, and Mrs. Malone, curtseying and flushing, found herself face to face with the Bishop. In the pride, which was almost pain, of that meeting, she was disturbed by the thought of appearing before his lordship in Mrs. Doran's old cloak, and wished that she could explain to him that she had really a beautiful lace shawl and silk gown underneath. But the Bishop had already taken her hand, and was leading her into the chapel, all the clergymen following.

Without further delay the service began, and the Bishop, in his sermon, scarcely mentioned the sacred statue, but dilated on the extraordinary virtues of the Saint of Carrickmachree. After service, Mrs. Malone was led back again to the sacristy, and the Bishop, having put on his overcoat and a soft hat and tied a muffler round his throat, took her arm, while Father John led them out into the open.

"We'll make a tour of the fair," said the Bishop gaily, "and you must act as my guide, Mrs. Malone, for, of course, I don't know my way about. And draw down the hood of your cloak, if you please, a little.

farther, for I don't know what would happen if the people found you among them."

Amidst the noise of thousands of voices, ringing of bells, shouts of hawkers, and the hum of movement in the throngs over the hill, Mrs. Malone could not hear his lordship very distinctly, but he pointed to her hood and she understood. Amongst the more secular shows were several hungry-looking acrobats shivering in the night air, and the Bishop seemed interested in their performances. Further on he was amused by the one-eyed man who explained the "trick of the loop." They moved then through a street of booths where pictures of Mrs. Malone and the miraculous statue were profusely displayed, amongst strings of beads specially blessed. The Bishop took a bright interest in everything, even in the swing-boats and shooting galleries, with schoolboy-like enjoyment, but Mrs. Malone was anxious about the great supper at home.

"If your lardship plaises," she ventured to say at last, "I'd be glad to be gettin' home now."

"Certainly, certainly, Mrs. Malone," he said, cheerfully. "It's all very entertaining! Father John's a wonderful man, a wonderful old man! Well, let's be getting home. I'm at your service."

There was some confusion at a near booth. On the counter, and hung from both roof and sides, were various articles, mostly of clothing, which Mrs. Malone seemed to recognise when she could get a glimpse over the heads of the people. Once the crowd broke away, and when she pressed forward she found, indeed, that the articles were her own property; several petticoats, a couple of bonnets, boots, even rings and hairpins. Behind the counter stood Mrs. Moriarty in white

nightcap, shrilly declaring, "Relics of the Saint of Carrickmachree! Rale relics, ladies an' jintlemin, divil a lie in it!" Further back, in the dimmer interior of the booth, were two of Mrs. Malone's farm-women, coolly arranging similar articles for sale. Overcome with her indignation, Mrs. Malone rushed to the counter.

"How dar' you," she exclaimed, "be sellin' them things!"

Mrs. Moriarty, in the act of selling an old pair of stockings to an eager customer, dropped them, and stared open-mouthed at the indignant lady.

"Glory be to God, ma'am!" she gasped. "Is it you?"

"How dar' you!" repeated Mrs. Malone vehemently. "Now I know where all my things are goin' to. Stolen away! I see Kate an' Mary there behind you," she added, raising her voice. "You needn't hide yourselves."

She felt a tug at her arm.

"I ask your pardon, my lard," she said; "but it's not the spoons an' knives an' forks I mind so much, but to have the whole world starin' at my petticoats——"

Those who had been crowding close were being pushed back by the Bishop's elbows. Mrs. Malone suddenly became aware of dozens of curious faces. She hurriedly drew her hood tighter about her head. In the next booth but one Mrs. Delahunt, who was endeavouring to sell relics of herself, saw the commotion, and, recognising Mrs. Malone, cried out that it was the Saint herself. With some other clergymen, Father John had acted, all the time, as a rearguard to

the Bishop and his companion, and now Father John, struggling through the crush, shouted to Mrs. Malone—

"Get away, now! Lose no time!"

Thoroughly alarmed, Mrs. Malone, with the Bishop holding tightly to her arm, attempted to force a way. But the news rapidly spread that the Saint was on the hill. Father John and his clerical friends, who fully realised the danger, elbowed and pushed the people about and for some time kept a clear passage for the two, who were now actual fugitives. But those away on the outskirts began to run forward and press in, and there were times when Mrs. Malone and the Bishop were separated and swallowed up in the yelling mass. The police, who were in force, gathered to the scene and helped the clergymen as far as was possible in the confusion. Those of the people who got close rushed to Mrs. Malone and recognised her, snatched at her clothing and staggered back, holding these relics aloft until others, maddened at the sight, fell upon them, and there were tumbling, fighting groups of frenzied, shrieking men and women.

The police drew their batons and charged again and again, while the clergymen struck out until their umbrellas were broken.

In a short while Mrs. Malone was in rags, and many who attempted to save her were battered and bleeding. There were cries of "Shame!" of little avail amidst the roar and shouting, while the mechanical pressure, caused by the constant accession of recruits to the mob, became more and more menacing. The naphtha-illumined booths and tents were deserted; and, meanwhile, amidst shrieks of agony and wild imprecations, the centre group were heading down the hill. A free

fight which developed rapidly at hand gave the police their best chance and they cleared a passage for Mrs. Malone, who, taking the Bishop by the hand, ran headlong down the incline. Where the hill dipped close to the road, there was an abrupt slope with a stagnant ditch at the bottom. Father John, who understood this danger, ran after them, but he was too late. Mrs. Malone and the Bishop suddenly disappeared, and went rolling over and over, madly clutching at one another, until they soused into the ditch. Maddened by this disaster, Father John, halting on the treacherous rim, faced round to the furious mob, and held his arms aloft.

"Now!" he roared, "are you satisfied? Back wid yiz, or I curse you, body an' sowl, iv'ry man, woman, an' child of yiz. Are you satisfied, now that ye've killed the Bishop and the Saint of Carrickmachree?"

Few heard these burning words, but somehow the greater part of the people seemed to recognise the black figure with the extended arms, and to understand that an appalling catastrophe had occurred through their fault. There was a distinct pressure backwards. At the same moment Father John felt some one tugging at his coat. He looked down. It was Jackeen.

"Ruh, the boy," cried Father John, bending down to the boy's white, startled face. "Run for yir life to Paddy O'Connor, an' tell him to ring the bell as hard as he kin go till I tell him to stop!"

On the instant Jackeen was off. Meanwhile, the Bishop and Mrs. Malone were struggling blindly out of the ditch, and the police, assisted by the priests and

some of the more sensible of the people, spread themselves along the edge of the hill to check any further rush. The Bishop, with battered hat and torn coat, was speechless. He was held up by two young priests, while Mrs. Malone, her head drooping, moaned piteously as two other clergymen helped her along. Behind these closed in a procession of priests and police. As they went round the hedge bordering the ditch and struck out on the road leading to the farm, through the wild roar which came from the excited mob left on the hill, there suddenly burst the clang of the chapel bell, ringing like an alarm.

CHAPTER XXXII

MERRIMENT OF THE BISHOP

THE front windows of the farmhouse were all alight. The long table, prepared for supper, was decorated with a profusion of flowers and family plate. In the open doorway stood Maureen, her slim figure in dainty white dress, her hair in a long plait which fell below her waist. When she saw the guests at last approaching she hurried forward, only to start back in horror at sight of her mother's dishevelled appearance. Mrs. Malone's best bonnet hung flattened at the back of her neck, one bare shoulder protruded through her torn mantle, and, as she staggered on with drooping head, supported on either side, the horrible thought that her mother was intoxicated covered Maureen's face with a burning flush.

"Mother," she gasped. "Oh, mother!"

Mrs. Malone instantly burst into a fit of weeping and, releasing herself from the two priests, staggered wildly past Maureen, and disappeared into the house. Before Maureen could hasten after, she saw the Bishop apparently in much the same condition as her mother,

the soft hat hiding his drooping head, and his clothes spattered with mud. She stepped aside as he was led into the supper-room, where for the present he was carefully and respectfully placed in the best chair. Here for a time he remained in a stupor, his chin sunken on his breast, whilst in the horrified silence of those about him several stood close, holding glasses to offer him when he should show signs of returning interest in life.

Maureen stood aside until the long rows of silk hats had crowded into the house, and the police had fallen back to hold the gate against groups of the curious who were coming up.

Meanwhile, Father John, having taken off his hat and brushed himself, went in to the Bishop, whom he approached with penitential reverence.

"Me lard," said he, in agitated voice, "I can't express, me lard, me dape regret for the——"

Raising his head, the Bishop sat up, holding the chair with both hands, and rolled his eyes at Father John, who shrank abashed.

"Send for my carriage!" exclaimed the Bishop. "Send for my carriage, at once!"

After this effort he collapsed again, while Father John, giving a terrified look round at the other silent priests, stole away.

In the opposite room Mrs. Malone, in a semi-fainting condition, was surrounded with women sympathisers, and a crowd of priests were grouped about, talking in undertones. Maureen had procured a shawl and wrapped it around her mother's shoulders.

"His lardship's goin'!" exclaimed Father John, entering. "He wants his carridge ordhered."

All turned to him with consternation, and, livelier than any one else, Mrs. Malone sat upright.

"What's that?" said she, clearing the nearest women away with a wave of her hand. "Won't he stay the night as he promised, an' his room ready, an' all the sheets aired, an' the supper as well?"

Shaking his head, Father John threw up his hands as the clergymen gathered round him.

"There's no gintler sowl," said Father John, "whin he's in the humour, but whin he's crossed he's an angry line. I wouldn't go near him agin—not for a hatful of gold. I must go ordher his carridge.

Mrs. Malone was now on her feet.

"He mustn't go!" she cried. "We'd be disgraced for iver. Father Faylix, go to him an' coax him to stay!"

They all suddenly turned to look at Father Felix, who shook his head and laughed.

"Faix, I know him too well," said he. "He'd eat me if I went near him now."

Making his way through the crowd of priests and women, Father John, approaching Mrs. Malone, whispered something in her ear which caused her to look round for Maureen, who was shielding herself from observation behind her mother.

"Come here, darlint," said Mrs. Malone.

Taking Maureen gently by the shoulder, she spoke a few words to her which made Maureen turn red and shake her head. Then Mrs. Malone, releasing her, spoke more sternly, and Maureen, after some painful hesitation, reluctantly crossed the room to Father Felix.

"Will you plaise go to his lardship," she asked, in faltering tones, "an' get him to stay?

There was an instant chorus from the priests—

"Now, thin, you can't refuse!"

For a moment Father Felix doubtfully regarded Maureen, who, having delivered her words as ordered, stood trembling before him with downcast eyes.

"Well, Maureen, my child," said he softly, "since it's yourself asks me, sure I must go and beard the lion in his den."

As he went out every one, save Maureen, looked unutterably relieved; and when in a short while he returned with the news that his lordship had consented to stay, he was greeted with a cheer. Immediately the hushed spell was broken—everybody began to talk at once; silk hats were placed in every possible place, and the clergy took off their overcoats with the briskness of a lot of schoolboys.

Half an hour later, when the Bishop and Mrs. Malone were cleansed and suitably attired, the great supper began. Seated at the head of the long table, with Mrs. Malone on his right, Maureen on his left, the Bishop, after he had eaten and drank a little, recovered his habitual good spirits, and his speech proposing the health of the hostess was both elegant and witty. During the gay progress of the repast, a servant having entered from the back, whispered something to Father John, who being near the far end of the table rose, and looking towards the Bishop, coughed loudly.

"Me lard," said he, "I hope ye'll excuse me lavin' the table."

"Certainly," said his lordship, "I'd rather excuse you leaving it than taking it with you."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally, and when the

noise subsided a moment Father John was still on his feet.

"I'm tould a lady wishes to see me, me lard," he explained.

"At your age, Father John!" exclaimed his lordship, with sly surprise, and in the midst of a fresh burst of merriment, Father John left the room.

When he entered the hall he found there a tall, thin woman dressed in black, and with her face bent. At the opening of the supper-room door, with its accompanying burst of gaiety, she looked up and he recognised Mrs. Delahunt.

"Father John," she said, nervously.

"What d'you want?" he asked, sternly, adding, as he stamped across to the opposite room, now deserted; "come in here and tell me what you want."

She followed him, timidly glancing round at the rows of silk hats and piles of coats. Standing near the door she looked anxiously at his angry face.

"You promised me, yir riverence," said she, with a dry cough, "you'd prisint me to his lardship."

"I did make such a promise," said Father John, "but I don't mane to kape it."

Starting, with a catch of the breath, her face seemed to grow colder.

"Don't mane——" she faltered.

"No," said Father John. "I was on the hill an' saw you runnin' about to tell the people who Mrs. Malone was. Don't deny it," he exclaimed, raising his hand, "I heard you meself. I know what's in yir heart. Black jealousy of this good, gentle woman is in yir heart. You want to be in the first place, but that ye'll never be."

"Oh, no, yir riverence, there's no jealousy in my heart."

"Don't dare conthradict me!" exclaimed Father John. "She was allowed, by the grace of God, to be the first woman to see the miracle, an' that's bin ranklin' in yir bosom iver since. I've seen it all along. Away wid you now. Ye'll not see his lardship's face to-night."

Putting her black-gloved hands over her face, Mrs. Delahunt burst into tears, and at the same time there was a burst of laughter, with cheering and rattling of many glasses from the supper-room. But her tears, far from softening Father John, hardened his heart, and he looked with secret disfavour at her black attire.

"Ye'd be a melancholy object anyhow," said he, "in there."

She glanced up quickly with a gleam of hope.

"Sure, yir riverence," said she eagerly, "I can run home an' dress myself all in white."

Father John made an impatient movement of his hand.

"Go home, an' stay at home," said he.

She began to sob again.

"I've worked for you an' slaved for you," said she. "You know, yir riverence, I'd lie down in the dust if you ordhered me."

"I know that," assented Father John; "I don't deny ye'r a good daughter of the Church."

"An' I set me heart," she added, eagerly again, "on bein' honoured by bein' prisinted to his lardship; an honour I'd nivir disremimber to my dyin' day!"

He wagged his head resolutely from side to side, then shook his hand at her.

"You won't see him, not to-night anyhow. That's yir pinance, now. Go home. I've tould you it's yir pinance."

After one more despairing look at his inflexible face she turned sadly and left the house, sobbing: the sounds of mirth following her beyond the gate.

Whilst the supper proceeded, amidst ever-increasing hilarity, there was a sudden burst of music without. Immediate silence followed in the room, and all looked at the Bishop, who looked at Father John.

"Me lard," explained Father John, rising, "it's a quire of men an' boys, or, if it plaises you, boys an' men. The organist of Bohanabree writ out some music or other in honour of yir lordship an' Mrs. Malone." He sat down, but instantly rose. "Excuse me, yir lardship. The song is for Mrs. Malone. There's a brass band for yir lardship."

"You're a wonderful man, Father John," said his lordship, openly pleased. "Gentlemen, let's adjourn and hear the music."

All rose, and the Bishop, giving his arm to Mrs. Malone, led the way. Two chairs were placed outside the front door for the Bishop and Mrs. Malone, the clergymen and guests grouping themselves behind, whilst the hall was crowded with farm hands and their friends. Just within the gates stood a surpliced choir, two rows of boys in front, a row of men behind, and, further back, bandsmen in green and gold uniforms awaiting the cessation of the vocal music. Stretching away along the road was a multitude of rapt listeners, and through the strains of the choir

came the distant hammering of the scaffolders in the big meadow.

Maureen had slipped to her room upstairs, where she sat at the window, her face on her hands, sadly contemplating the dark and silent haggard where the unfortunate schoolmaster lay hiding. The choir had repeated their hymn of praise, the band began, and when the instruments finished there rose a tumultuous burst of cheering, which still rang in Maureen's ears when, having locked her door, she crept into bed and cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TORCHES AND DRUMS

NEXT day a deputation of the more contrite inhabitants waited on his lordship at the farm to express their horror of the unfortunate accident of the previous evening. To the surprise of these gentlemen, the Bishop treated the matter almost jocularly and asked them to dismiss it from their minds. While declaring their pleasure at this attitude, they averred that the general inhabitants were deeply concerned for the safety of his lordship and Mrs. Malone, about whom the wildest stories were in circulation; whereupon his lordship stated that, to ease the consciences of the people, he and Mrs. Malone would drive through the town in an open carriage after the laying of the foundation stones of the new chapel and priest's house; at which the deputation departed in great joy to tell the glad news and set the town in order.

The laying of the foundation stones occupied the greater part of the forenoon, and was witnessed by a select crowd, mostly of clergymen, in a special enclosure, and a much greater throng without. Later, in the open window above the shop door, sat

Mrs. Delahunt in black, her austere face agitated with strange eagerness. She remained motionless, her black-gloved hands clasped on her lap. Beside her stood Mr. Delahunt in his best Sunday clothes, his hair brushed up almost straight on either side of his bald pate, his excited face having bars of red alternating with white. He frequently rose, leaned halfway out of the casement, to look up the street to see if the procession had started. What he saw was a multitude of people flecked with banners, whilst away near the road which turned towards the farmhouse were bandsmen in green uniforms with much gold lace and men on horseback wearing green scarves. Along the route were crowds of back-country people pressed against the walls of the houses, the centre of the thoroughfare being kept comparatively clear by the police aided by men in cassocks with long white wands, each wand having a green bow tied near the top. A large number of the workmen who were engaged on the new chapel were mingled with the crowd. Nearly opposite Delahunt's shop was a group of foreign workmen who interested Mrs. Delahunt—oval-faced, dark-eyed, handsome men smoking cigarettes, amused and intent, wearing peaked caps, blue blouses with black leathern belts, and very wide trousers tucked in at the ankles. These foreigners, though intent on all, were not apparently excited like the people around them, and were extremely polite, making way at every request with courteous smiles and bows.

"An' did Father John," asked Mrs. Delahunt for the twentieth time—"did Father John tell you he'd spoken to the Bishop?"

Mr. Delahunt jumped off his chair, protruded his body half out of the window, stared up the thoroughfare, and was dragged back by the coat-tails.

"Did you hear what I said?" asked Mrs. Delahunt, sternly.

Passing his hand hastily through his hair, Mr. Delahunt gaped at the group of foreign workmen.

"He did," he replied; "he arranged it all wid his lardship, an' his lardship said he'd heard a great dale about you, an' he'd be on the look-out for you an' look up at the winda an' bow to you."

"An' wave his hand?" said Mrs. Delahunt, fixing his wandering glance with her firm eyes.

"Wave his hand?" repeated Mr. Delahunt, vaguely.

He made as if to thrust himself through the window again, muttering something about the "purcession" being late, but she was too quick for him, with outstretched hand.

"I axed you to ax Father John," she explained, holding his coat, "to ax his lardship, as a special favour, to wave his hand. Sit down there in yir chair while I talk to you an' don't be hoppin' up an' down like a Jack-in-the-box: Did Father John say the Bishop'd wave his hand?"

Sitting down, holding his trunk upright and tucking his legs under the chair, Mr. Delahunt seized his troubled brow with his right hand and tightly closed his eyes.

"Did I," said he, "or did I not specificate, that his lardship'd wave his hand?"

There was a little scream from Mrs. Delahunt. He looked at her in alarm.

"Is there any doubt on yir mind about it?" said

she, in a harsh voice, "after all the careful instructions I gev you? For if the people saw him bowin' they'd only see him make a bow in a jinral way to the house, but if he waved his hand, they'd know it was meant for me."

"I niver thought of that!" said Mr. Delahunt, looking admiringly at her.

She gave another little scream and half rose from her seat.

"Niver thought of it!" she exclaimed, "after me impressin' it on you fifty times!"

"No, no, Bridget; what I mane"—Mr. Delahunt stood up, but sat down again abruptly at her threatening look, while he gripped himself by the knees—"I mane, I niver thought of the raison of yir wantin' him to wave his hand! Now that I remimber—of coorse!" he exclaimed, joyfully striking himself on the knee. "Sure, of coorse, I did, an' it'll be all right. Hould on now. What's that?"

The murmur of the crowd rose to a roar that was surmounted by a sudden roll of drums.

"The purcession's start'n'!" shouted Mr. Delahunt, thrusting himself, as before, through the window, while even his wife, in the excitement of the moment, rose to look over his shoulder. "It is!" he cried. "It's comin! Glory be to God, this is a great day for ould Carrickmachree! It's comin'! D'you hear the bands an' the shoutin' an' the wavin' of flags? Won't thim foreign chaps have the sight taken out of their eyes! Surc they niver saw the like."

"Who can see anyhow," exclaimed his wife, tugging at his coat behind, "wid yir carkiss stuck in the winda·

like that? Sit down like a Christian an' behave yiv-self. His lordship won't be able to see me at all wid you."

When she had dragged him back by main force she leaned out herself, whilst he stood behind her on tiptoe, staring at the tops of the crowd of heads opposite and the bunting floating in the breeze. But presently Mrs. Delahunt, becoming conscious of being undignified, sat down and tried to compose her excited face. Scarcely had she left the casement when Mr. Delahunt was again leaning out, hurraying and waving his hand. When she pulled him back he was out again as soon as she let him go. The crashing of the half-dozen bands, the roaring of the great multitude, the expectant cries of those in the immediate neighbourhood seemed to keep him in a fever.

"I see the carridge! I see the Bishop!" he shouted.

"For God's sake come in an' sit down!" exclaimed Mrs. Delahunt. "I won't be able to see his lardship, an' his lardship won't be able to see me!"

The people beneath them became more agitated, swaying, standing on tiptoe, waving arms, hats, shawls, whilst the foreign workmen, silent and alert, looked on and smoked their cigarettes.

The approach was heralded by a wild rush down the centre of the street; the music sounded louder and still louder; then burst forth one mighty, thundering "Hurray!"

People rushed to the windows and threw them up. Nearer and nearer came the music, thicker and thicker grew the crowd. Turning deathly white, Mrs. Dela-

hunt clasped her black-gloved hands so tightly that she burst the stitches. Mr. Delahunt remained hanging out of the window, but pressed back against the sash so that his wife might see.

"Here they come!" he yelled. "Glory be to God, but it's a great sight!"

The music seemed to burst right in through the open window now, and already before Mrs. Delahunt's dazzled eyes went by, above the bobbing heads of thousands of people, fluttering flags and great banners floating and swaying. Pressing her hands against her thin breast, Mrs. Delahunt became rigid.

"Whisht!" gasped Mr. Delahunt. "Here's the carridge an' his lardship!"

Assuming a sweet smile of welcome, Mrs. Delahunt leaned out on one elbow, her forefinger stretched along her cheek.

Right underneath was passing a two-horse carriage bearing the little fat Bishop, looking bored, and barely acknowledging the plaudits. Beside him sat Mrs. Malone in her black satin and a new bonnet with jet trimmings, a great bouquet in her hands. She smiled and bowed right and left, her handsome face flushed with pride and excitement. On the opposite seat sat Father John, respectfully grim, with the Bishop's private secretary. Mr. Delahunt was thrusting his wife aside in his excitement.

"God bless yir lardship!" he yelled, waving his arm before his wife's face, "Long life to yir lardship!"

He was grasped firmly by the shoulders and hurled back against the chair. He saw his wife's eyes blazing, her white face throbbing.

"He never looked up!" she shrieked.

"He did! Didn't you notice?" cried Mr. Delahunt, waving his arms. "Didn't I see him smile at you. Sure, they went too fast——"

"They didn't! He niver looked up!"

Mrs. Delahunt covered her face with her hands.

"Look!" cried Mr. Delahunt, rushing to the window again. "Did you iver see such a lot of prastes? God bless you, Father Faylix! Long life to you, Father Faylix! Hurray for the good nuns of Thranquilla!"

Father Felix went by, erect and smiling, in his handsome trap with a fellow-priest beside him. He was one of a long line of traps and cars, full of clergymen, all looking happy. After them came another band, more banners, more clubs and sodalities, flags, and cheering people. But Mrs. Delahunt did not take her hands from her face.

During the progress of the long double lines of silk hats glittering in the sunlight Mr. Delahunt called out the names of the priests whom he recognised, others he repeated from the crowd underneath, the rest he invented, all the time simulating an interest he did not feel, his mind being worried by the fact that he could not open the public-house until the procession had returned.

"All for that woman!" moaned Mrs. Delahunt, between her fingers; "because she shoves herself forward, an' has the money. The vanity of her! The brazenness of her, sated there beside his lardship an' bowin' an' smilin' as if it was all got up to show her off! I'll be even wid her yit!"

The procession ended in a chaotic mob who now went by the window, yelling. At length, when the

music sounded faint in the distance, Mrs. Delahunt angrily dried her eyes with her fingers and sat forward to look out as her husband drew in his head.

"It'll be coming back soon," said she, "Maybe it's when he's comin' back, he'll look up at me!"

"Sure, there y'are!" exclaimed Mr. Delahunt, with affected glee. "Ye'v a rare head on yir showlders, anyhow, Bridget. Worth a dozen Mrs. Malones. Sure, you see the way the Bishop was sittin'. That's it. It'd have given him a crick in the neck to look up. But wait, whin he comes back he'll be sittin' on the other side an' thin——"

"Hould yir whist!" exclaimed his wife, bending further out of the window. "I can't hear a thing wid yir jabber. They're turnin' round at the cross-roads. The hind part has stopped. I hope nothin's wrong."

Mr. Delahunt inwardly hoped that everything was wrong; it would save him keeping up the deception of having arranged for his wife's recognition by the Bishop. But he said—

"Sure, there's nothin' wrong. Nothin' could go wrong while his lardship's here."

When the end of the procession halted where the town finished, there was some confusion, owing to the necessity of the turning on the cross-roads. But soon all was started right again, and Mrs. Delahunt's eyes became jubilant. There ensued, however, a long wait. At last the crowds under the window began to hurry about. The blare of the brass bands grew more distinct. The Bishop's carriage was sighted. Mrs. Delahunt began to breathe in short breaths. Her husband, placing an arm on her shoulder, leaned over and anxiously watched the return. Again the roaring

increased; flags and hats were waved. The Bishop was smiling now; he was returning to dinner. Mrs. Malone, with aching head and neck, was still heroically bowing on every side. In her excitement Mrs. Delahunt leaned out as far as she could, and her husband, in alarm, held her by the shoulders. But his lordship, unconscious of her presence, never raised his eyes. The carriage passed on, and Mrs. Delahunt, with a gasp, fell back in the chair, whilst her husband, seizing a decanter of water from the mantelpiece, began to sprinkle her face. Presently, opening her eyes, she jumped up and struck the decanter from his hand.

"It's your fault!" she shrieked at him as he backed into a corner. "His lardship's bin tould of yir want of religion. That's what you've brought me to. You've ruined me!"

She held her clenched hands trembling against her breast a moment, then threw them towards him, claw-like, as if to tear out his eyes. But, overcome with her emotions, she sank back again into the chair and Mr. Delahunt swiftly departed from the room, the strains of the last band, the trampling of thousands and the roaring of the crowd following him down the stairs.

When he stumbled into the shop he pulled himself up and looked around. The shutters had not been taken down since the night before and the centre lamp shed ghastly lustre, making deep shadows in the corners. All day long, from early morning, men had been knocking violently at the barred and double-bolted door, kicking it with their heels as they leaned their backs against it, whilst others, facing it, struck the panels over the heads of their companions. But Mr.

Delahunt, loyal to Father John's orders, had kept his shop closed until the procession returned. Now that the hours of opening drew swiftly on, there was renewed knocking not only on the door, but on the shutters, and sometimes so great a crash that Mr. Delahunt, standing in the centre of the floor, his eyes starting, thought that the people would burst in. He looked at his watch. He had ten minutes. Swiftly creeping back upstairs and stealing past the room where he had left his wife, he opened the door of the next room where his three daughters, with the baby, had watched the procession in company with the four young men who assisted in the shop. Mr. O'Neil, the senior assistant, first saw the door open, and quickly withdrew his arm from the waist of the eldest Miss Delahunt. Beckoning to him, Mr. Delahunt turned back towards the stairs, the other lads following. Down in the shop they all took off their coats, depositing them under the counter; then the two strongest stood either side of the door, and Mr. Delahunt, leaning over the counter, watch in hand, counted the minutes. The knocking was redoubled. Shouts of "Open!" could be plainly heard in the silent interior. Mr. Delahunt kept his eyes on his watch. When the time came he looked up.

"Open!" he exclaimed.

Instantly the two young men unbarred the door, drew back the bolts and jumped aside. Next moment a crowd of men came tumbling in, fighting their way to the counter, some falling on hands and knees whilst others struggled over them. The work of the day began.

So busy was Mr. Delahunt, running hither and

thither, perspiring in his shirt-sleeves and red in the face, that the hours seemed to pass like minutes. When dusk came, he was startled to hear the pulsating of the drums again in the distance and the ascending murmur of a great crowd. The Bishop was leaving the town, escorted by a torchlight procession. Every one hastily finished their glasses and rushed out of doors. In a twinkling the shop was deserted.

Dashing wildly upstairs, Mr. Delahunt sought his wife. He found her seated in the same room and the same attitude as he had left her hours before.

"The Bishop's goin'!" cried Mr. Delahunt. "Ye'll see him from the winda agin, an' plaise Gód, though it's dark, he'll look up at you!"

With writhing face she started instantly to her feet and Mr. Delahunt as quickly recoiled. Without a word she jumped to the window, dragged down the blind, and shut the shutters, leaving the room in total darkness.

"Now," she shrieked, "let him look up if he likes! It's you has brought this on me. You niver attinded to yir religion till it began to pay you. You've ruined an' disgraced me!"

Hastily Mr. Delahunt groped his way out and downstairs, hearing at every step the shrieking reproaches of his wife from the dark room. Presently he stood, still in his shirt-sleeves, on the pavement at the back of the crowd and added his feeble cheer to the wild roar of the enthusiastic mob, as the Bishop, in his carriage, escorted by torchbearers, bands and bannermen, passed in triumph from Carrickmachree.

CHAPTER XXXIV

STOP!

FAINT bars of light from the scaffolding in the big meadow fell across the stable-yard, mingling with the starlight. But there was deep shadow over the barn, where, on the steps, sat Maureen and Martin Harrington, Maureen on the lower step.

"Lyin' there all alone in hospital," said Maureen, gazing before her; "gettin' worse an' worse, with no one to tell him what is happenin' at home. Poor dads! Poor dads! Nothin'll prevent me goin' to him. Nothin'! An' you can come part of the way."

"If you've really made up your mind to go to your poor father," said Martin, "for Heaven's sake don't think of me! I'm stronger now, an' can take care of myself. I mean to write to mother in a day or two, an' she'll send me the money to take me home."

"I have ten pounds that dads left me," said Maureen. "I won't lave you behind. Who's to mind you, now Larry's gone with Dismond? You'd starve an' die. We'll start, as I've said, to-morra."

"I couldn't think of it!" protested Martin. "You've been too good to me already, an' you'll want all your

money to bring you to England. But what'll your mother say?"

Maureen shivered. "I'm more afeard of mother," she replied, "than any one else since she became a saint. What's that?"

Through the continuous hammering from the new buildings they heard a sharp cry as of some animal in pain. Both looked up and around.

"It's only a dog cryin' at the moon," suggested Martin.

He spoke uneasily, and again they heard the same low wail.

"There's no moon," said Maureen, lowering her voice and seizing his arm. "It's not that."

"What, then?"

"The Banshee. Och, I'm afeard somethin's goin' to happen."

"You're not yourself," said Martin, affecting to laugh, "because there's thunder in the air to-night. I feel a bit unstrung myself!"

As he spoke he took off his cap to cool his head, whilst Maureen, bending forward, softly sobbed with her hands against her face.

"There's a light in your bedroom," said Martin, suddenly.

A light was moving in her room. Presently the window was thrust up, and her mother, looking far out into the yard, called her. Maureen shrank against the wall.

"Are you there, Maureen?" cried her mother again.

"I'd better go," whispered Maureen, hastily. "Be ready to-morra night. We'll get the train at Bohanabree. Remember!"

His hand, which had fallen to her shoulder, she pressed against her cheek, then ran forward as the back door was thrown open and her mother came out.

"My darlint child!" exclaimed Mrs. Malone, "what are you doin' out here at this time of night? Come in, avic. Some one has come to see you."

Following her mother in, Maureen saw, by the light over the front door at the end of the passage, the cold, smiling face of the Lady Superioress.

The three women entered the room, but Mrs. Malone quickly retired, leaving Maureen alone with the stranger. For half an hour Maureen sat beside the Lady Superioress, who held her hand and spoke to her in low tones of the blessedness of a life secluded from the wicked world. Maureen tried to listen, but her thoughts were far away. She left the room at last with the cold impact of the lady's lips upon her forehead. As she passed through the landing upstairs she was vaguely conscious of the dim figure of Jackeen, who, with his back turned, seemed idly gazing through the window at the road. When Maureen hurried into her own room she flung herself on the bed, burying her hot face in the cool pillows. Next moment she heard the key turned in the lock from the outside, and, raising herself on her hands, listened to footsteps retreating down the passage. Springing up, she tried to open the door. It was locked. For some time she beat on the panels and called. But no one answered. Towards morning she threw herself on the bed again and fell into unquiet slumber.

When she awoke it was broad daylight. While she slept some one had placed a mug of milk with some slices of bread on the dressing-table. But the door

still remained locked. The house seemed strangely silent. She sat on the side of the bed recalling the events of the night, whilst all the time there was a humming in her brain. Towards midday she heard Jackeen whistling down the passage. Hastening to the door, she called to him.

"What's the matter, Maureen?" he asked.

"The door's locked!" exclaimed Maureen. "I want to get out!"

"Isn't the kay inside wid you?" inquired Jackeen, innocently.

She looked down at the lock with a momentary gleam of hope, and about the floor.

"No, Jackeen, it's not here at all."

"It's not here, ayther," returned Jackeen, coolly.

"Who has it?" asked Maureen, indignantly. "Who dare lock me in?"

"The sorra know I know," answered Jackeen, stupidly. "I'll go an' ax."

"Yes, do, Jackeen, do!"

She listened eagerly to his steps as he went downstairs. Then, crossing to the window, she stood there wistfully gazing over the stable-yard towards the roofs of the sheds in the haggard. But time went on and Jackeen did not appear. Nor did any one come. Repeatedly she beat on the door and called and listened. Sometimes she heard the dishes moved in the kitchen; sometimes the heavy foot of a labourer on the flagged passage below. In a state of affright she walked about, her hot hands pressed on her bosom. Then she thought she heard footsteps, and rushed to the door again. Some one was passing; there was subdued whispering. Shaking the door handle, she

passionately demanded her freedom. The whispering ceased. There was silence. Bursting into a storm of tears, she threw herself on the floor. When she rose she put her mouth against the door and sobbed—

"Mother, mother, won't you come t' me!"

So the day passed. When night came, full of vague terror, she crept, still undressed, under the bedclothes. At dawn she rose to listen and call at the door again; to sit at the window watching the sunrise shimmering on the stable roofs. Towards noon that day she got paper and pen.

"To-night," she wrote, "you must get a ladder and help me to escape. They have locked me up. I am in great danger."

She directed this note to Martin, and, having folded it, opened her window and waited for some one to pass by. Many strange men went to and fro, and some women of the farm whom she dare not trust. At last she saw Jackeen and called his name. Pausing beneath the window, he looked up with a smile on his thin face. Maureen leaned eagerly out.

"Didn't you git out yit, Maureen?"

"No, no, Jackeen!"

"What's the matther?"

As she leaned still further out he looked up with an expression of deep stupidity.

"Jackeen, listen. The schoolmaster's hid in the loft at the end of the haggard."

Jackeen started with a gesture of surprise.

"Arra, go on wid you, Maureen!" said he.

"It's truth I'm tellin'," said Maureen, piteously. "Look, Jackeen, will you go to him with this letter? You're not to rade it. Promise me to go at once!"

"Of coorse I will," returned Jackeen, with feverish eagerness.

"God bless you, Jackeen, God bless you!"

The little white note went sailing slowly down, and Jackeen adroitly caught it in his cap. He grinned up at his sister's anxious face, and sped across the yard towards the haggard, putting on his cap as he went. She watched him until he disappeared, then sank down beside the window with a gasp of relief.

Father John was enjoying a brief slumber in his big chair after the toil of a busy forenoon, when Jackeen burst into the room.

"Father, are you aslape?"

Father John instantly sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"Maureen threw me this letther out of the winda," explained Jackeen, excitedly, "an' tould me to give it to the schoolmasther. An' I ran into the haggard to decave her, but I thought I'd betther bring it to you first, bekase you might like to see it."

Putting on his spectacles without a word, Father John reached for the note, which he carefully read twice. Then, as he folded it, he looked angrily up at Jackeen, who stood before him smiling and rubbing his hands together.

"By me troth, this is a nice businiss!" exclaimed Father John. "That schoolmasther'd corrupt the whole world! He must be put clane out of the parish, an' that without delay. I won't have him on the sacred sile of Carrickmachree. Jackeen, me child, ye'r the bist boy in the world! Ye'r a rale good boy an' a janius."

"I did right, father," suggested Jackeen, with mock humility, "to bring it t' you?"

"You did right, me boy," assented Father John,

looking approvingly over his spectacles. "An' take this letther now to the schoolmasther. Wait till I fowld it up. Go to him an' give it to him."

"Give it to the schoolmasther?" exclaimed Jackeen, astonished.

"Yis, me boy. Them's the words I used. Lave the rest to me. I'll see this matther out. Yir sister's in great danger, but it's danger from that blaggard an' misbelaver. I'll settle wid him. He won't be twinty-four hours longer in the parish. I haven't had time to think about him, with the Bishop comin' an' all them things, but now I'll settle wid him an' have done with him. He'll have to go somewhere else, and work out his wickedness in some other place. But out of Carrickmachree he'll go, or I'll know the raison why. Go, Jackeen, my boy. God bless you! An' whin you give the letther to the schoolmasther, tell yir good mother I'll be round at the farm to see her in the coorse of an hour or so."

When Jackeen departed Father John, spreading a larger red handkerchief over his face, lay back in the chair and resumed his slumber.

Meanwhile Maureen was busy. Collecting all her valuables and clothing, she packed them into a bag. Still she thought the night would never come. The workmen came and went through the stable-yard. The hammering and the creaking of cranes and windlasses went on without intermission. At length came twilight. Later she saw the lamps and torches amongst the scaffolding. Raising the window sash higher, she sat there, fully dressed, with a cloak on, and the bag at her feet. Night came on, cloudy, without a moon. The shapes of the sheds in the yard grew more and

more indistinct; even the wooden pump was lost as darkness gathered in. Kneeling down, she bent out to peer towards the haggard. She heard a noise as of some one dragging something with difficulty over the cobbled yard. The scraping and bumping came nearer, mingled with panting, and she dimly saw Martin Harrington painfully struggling with a ladder. When, at length, he reached the window, he stood to wipe his brow, and looked up without a word. Bending down, she whispered that she was ready. Slowly, with weak hands and breathing short, he managed to place the ladder, and gripped it to keep it steady. Maureen first of all dropped her bag, which fell with gentle thud on the ground. Then she buttoned her cloak, and, gathering her skirts close about her, clambered cautiously out of the window, feeling carefully with her foot for the top rung. Martin Harrington, looking up with white face, caught his breath and held on tighter. Presently he felt the ladder give a little with the weight. Maureen was descending! Now she was on the ground. For a moment she caught his hand and put it to her cheek; next, she stooped for the bag.

"At last!" she whispered, excitedly, as she took his arm. "At last, thank God!"

Both faced towards the haggard, and, without another word, started.

"Stop!" cried a voice near.

Instantly they halted, tremblingly looked into one another's terrified faces, then peered all about into the darkness, but saw no one.

"Come on!" panted Maureen. "It wasn't meant for us! Oh, let's hurry!"

They ran blindly together as far as the pump.

"Stop!" shouted the voice again, with deadly menace.

For an instant Maureen swayed heavily in her lover's arms, then slipped down on the stones. As he stooped to reach for her he was seized by strong arms and torn away. At the same moment the unconscious Maureen was carried into the house.

CHAPTER XXXV

MRS. MORIARTY'S EVIDENCE

OWING to the sweep made by Father John, acting under the Bishop's orders, of the miscellaneous booths, the hillside around the barricaded chapel looked comparatively deserted. The focus of public interest had shifted to Delahunt's shop where the half shutters where up. The police with difficulty kept a way for the jurymen, who, as they struggled in, were recognised by many of the crowd. Towards four in the afternoon the coroner himself arrived, causing an increased thrill. As soon as he was inside he was welcomed in the semi-darkness by the subdued Mr. Delahunt, who was dressed in black. The coroner, having driven several miles, had some liquid refreshment, after which he proceeded to the bar-parlour, where the jury were already seated round the long table, Sergeant Mulcahy standing in the corner, his back to the window, his thumbs in his belt, and his grey eyes watching the case on behalf of the Crown. Having bowed to the jury, the coroner tucked up the tails of his coat and sat down at the head of the table.

"Well, gentlemen," said he, briskly, "you all know the melancholy sarcamstances that call us together. We'll just have you all sworn now before you view the corpse."

One after another they were duly sworn by the clerk; and, while this was proceeding, the coroner wiped his spectacles and put them carefully on.

"The deceased," he explained, when the jury resumed their seats, "was found with marks of violence, an' we'll take the evidence of witnesses as soon as you've returned. You can go out now an' look at the body."

They all rose again with the exception of Paddy O'Connor, who remained doggedly seated as his fellow jurymen filed singly past him. The coroner, who had already had his official view the night before, crossing his legs, turned sideways to glance at the dirty window, while he tapped the table as an accompaniment to some tune running in his brain.

"Beg pardon, Misther Coroner," observed a slow, deliberate voice.

The coroner, Dr. O'Kelly, looked brightly up at Sergeant Mulcahy who had spoken.

"What is it, Sergeant?"

Being a popular man, the coroner, anxious to be on the best of terms with every one, smiled at the grim sergeant.

"There's a man here, Misther Coroner," said the sergeant, with a stern nod of the head at the solitary juryman, "who doesn't seem inclined to view the corpse. But, as I undherstand, he's legally bound——"

"Of course, of course," said the coroner, turning quickly to Paddy O'Connor, who began to shift his

eyes in every direction. "Paddy, you'll have to go out with the rest. What's wrong with you?"

Putting his hand to his throat, Paddy O'Connor began to lick his dry lips.

"I don't fale up to it," said he, hoarsely.

There was a triumphant flash in the sergeant's eyes under his bent brows.

"Oh, bedad, I can't help you," said the coroner. "It's the law, Paddy. Out you must go whether you like it or not. So away with you. It won't kill you."

With a sulky scowl Paddy slowly rose and, avoiding the fixed stare of the sergeant, turned heavily to the coroner.

"I suppose," said he, "I kin take a mouthful of whiskey afore I go out to look at him?"

The coroner, having glanced at the sergeant, shook his head; this time with determination.

"You may not, Paddy," said he; "I'll keep you within the strict letter of the law. Away with you now or the rest of the jury'll be comin' back if you don't hurry."

With a discontented frown Paddy O'Connor shuffled with leaden feet across the back-yard. Most of the jury were already returning from the door of the shed, putting on their hats as they emerged into the open. Going close to the door, Paddy O'Connor looked at each man as he came out but evinced no desire to enter. Presently he was troubled by a heavy hand on the shoulder and glanced up with a shiver. Sergeant Mulcahy, standing beside him, pointed sternly towards the interior of the shed.

"In you go," said the sergeant.

For a moment Paddy O'Connor looked defiantly

at the speaker, then lurched in, the sergeant following close behind.

Three or four jurymen, morbidly inclined, were still gazing on the linen-bound face of the dead schoolmaster, who lay stretched out on a rough table under a snow-white sheet, his hands folded on his breast over a crucifix. At the head of the corpse burned two long wax candles. Conscious of the observant eyes of the sergeant, Paddy O'Connor gazed a moment at this spectacle, then, turning away, hurried back across the yard with a quickness which seemed surprising after his tardy approach. His lips tightly pressed, both hands gripping his belt, the sergeant followed with measured pace to the bar-parlour, where the rest of the jury were already reseating themselves.

"Well, gentleman," said the coroner, having waited politely for Paddy to sit down. "You've viewed the remains and the reason you're called together is to decide, if possible, in what manner the deceased came to his untimely end. I'll just ask Sergeant Mulcahy to give evidence. Swear the sergeant."

The clerk on the right of the coroner stood up. The sergeant took off his cap.

"The evidence you shall give in this case shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; so help you God. Kiss the book."

Stiffly the sergeant bent, kissed the evil-smelling little Testament, straightened himself and looked steadily at the coroner.

"You will tell the jury," said the coroner, "what you know as to the finding of the body."

"Information was brought to the barracks," said the sergeant, with great deliberation, "an' in company

with two constables I went to the haggard at the back of Mrs. Malone's farm an' there found the decaised lyin' on his face. I felt the body an' it was cowld. As far as I could judge, he had been dead for some time. As there was much confusion, masonry work, foreigners, and a great dale of company at the farm, I thought it betther to have the body conveyed here."

"You identify the remains?"

"I identify the remains," replied the sergeant, glancing across at the bent face of Paddy O'Connor, "as those of the young schoolmasther, Misther Martin Harrington."

"What wounds or marks did you find on the deceased?"

"I found the back of his skull batthered in with the blow of a hammer or some heavy, blunt insthrument."

There was a general murmur of obvious discontent at this definite statement. The coroner, glancing round the jury, understood.

"Well, sergeant," said he, "we'll have medical testimony, of course. I think that'll do for the present. You may sit down or stand up, just as you please," he smiled pleasantly. "Call Dr. Finnerty."

Softly opening the door directly behind him, the clerk called: "Docthor Finnerty!" The constable on duty immediately without, repeated, "Docthor Finnerty!" and the doctor, who was quite close, at once entered. He was a bald-headed young man of serious aspect; a very popular practitioner in Bohanabree. Having taken the oath he gave evidence of *post-moriem* examination of the deceased, who, in his opinion, died a violent death.

"Wait a moment, doctor," said the coroner. "There

was a great lot of stones and buildin' materials, Sergeant, in the haggard?"

"There was, sir," said the sergeant, "but not close to the deceased."

"Well, Doctor Finnerty," resumed the coroner, "could the wounds on the back of the head have been caused by falling against a block of masonry, for instance?"

Dr. Finnerty thoughtfully felt his chin a moment as all the jury turned expectantly towards him, Paddy O'Connor with special eagerness.

"Well," replied the doctor, doubtfully, "that might be so." There was a general sigh of relief. "If he fell back and his head struck violently, very violently, against a large stone. It is possible, but not probable."

"Thank you, Doctor." The coroner nodded amiable dismissal.

"Call the next witness."

The clerk, taking up his list, went out to the constable and mentioned the name of Mrs. Moriarty, whereupon the constable shouted loudly, "Mrs. Moriarty!" as if she was a mile away, instead of sitting meekly close by, amongst the awed line of witnesses on the bench. With mouth wide open, treading on tiptoe, Mrs. Moriarty came in, the constable closing the door behind her. She wore a black bonnet over her white nightcap, holding her plaid shawl tightly at her neck with both hands and looking at the coroner as if he was about to order her instant execution. Rising beside her, the clerk repeated the form of oath, after which there was a pause.

"Kiss the book," repeated the clerk.

"Mrs. Moriarty, who had been staring fixedly into

sergeai

space, started as the clerk thrust the Testament close to her face.

"I beg pardin', sir?" she said.

"Kiss the book!" he repeated.

"The book, sir? Where? What book?" she grasped.

He put it close to her eyes.

"That little thing!" she exclaimed, surprised. "Sartinly! of coorse."

Having kissed it, she held it so determinedly that the clerk had to struggle for it. The coroner, turning in his seat, blandly waved his hand towards the empty chair against the wall.

"Sit down there, Mrs. Moriarty."

She gazed around, saw the chair, dusted it carefully with the end of her shawl, and, sitting down, took a large white handkerchief from her pocket and held it tightly in both hands as she blushed at the coroner.

"Mrs. Moriarty, you knew the deceased?"

"The what, yir worship?"

"The deceased. The schoolmaster—Mister Harrington."

"In troth an' in troth, I did, yir worship." Pressing the handkerchief to her eyes, one after another, Mrs. Moriarty wept a while; then, rolling the handkerchief into a ball, held it on her lap. "A betther or a kinder or a gintler young man niver dhrew the breath of life. Sure his death has bin a terrible blow to me, yir worship, for I used to wash his clothes an' darn his socks. Day afther day I've got ready his bit of breakfast an' his dhrop of tay, an' me wid the rheumatics. There've bin times," she added, looking around the

jury, for sympathy, "when I could'nt drag wan fut afther another, an' shure didn't I git relafe whin I ped my five good-lookin' shillin's to the miraklis statya?"

With his right arm on the top of the chair, leaning back, the coroner affably regarded her.

"Now, what kind of young man was he, Mrs. Moriarty? You had great opportunities of knowing him. Was he sad or gay like?"

Before replying Mrs. Moriarty shook her head solemnly up and down, drawing in the corners of her mouth, and touching her eyes with her handkerchief.

"Sad was no name for it, yir worship. Shure, he'd sit be the fire watchin' me makin' the tay, an' niver a word would he spake for an hour, but sigh an' sigh as if his heart would break. An' sure, whin the rheumatics was bad on me, he'd often not let me do a sthroke of work, but up an' swape the floore himself an' make me a bit of toast. He was a rale, swate, kind boy. God rest his sowl!"

There was a reverent murmur of "Amin!" from several of the jury.

"Now, listen attentively, Mrs. Moriarty," said the coroner, holding up a forefinger. "Did he ever express a desire to take his life?"

"Orra, no, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Moriarty, looking up with horror. "He niver said the like. But shure, now I remimber, whin I kimplained of the rheumatics he'd say, 'Sure, Mrs. Moriarty, there's pains an' thrubbles of the mind worse nor any pains in the body.' For he always samed to have somethin' on his mind, God help him!"

"Always something on his mind," repeated the coroner, with a wise air. "Now, was his health good?"

"In troth, it was not, then, yir worship. A poor, wake, delikit crature; more like a slip of a girl. I niver thought he'd grow to be a sthrong man. But whin I thried to git him to go to the miraklis statya, he'd always shake his head. Shake his head up an' down as if his heart was broken. The rale truth, yir worship," added Mrs. Moriarty, bending forward and speaking in a confidential whisper, "he niver samed to have any money like to make a conthribution."

There was a pause. The coroner seemed to be considering his next question. Presently, however, he glanced round the table and asked if any gentleman wished to put a question to the witness. As no one desired to do so he courteously dismissed Mrs. Moriarty, greatly to her disappointment, since she would gladly have remained for the rest of the day in the proud position of witness. However, she curtsied to the coroner, then to the jury, and squeezed her way through the door which the constable held slightly open. Before the clerk could summon another witness, there was a tap as of a stick at the door without, and Father John pushed his way brusquely in. Instantly, the coroner and the entire jury stood up and remained standing until the clerk pulled forward the witness chair, on which Father John sat down, immediately drawing a large roll of paper from his tail-pocket.

"I don't want to intherfare wid yir labours, Misther Coroner," said he, when he had put on his spectacles. "But I knew the decaised, an' as I have to go up to the

chapel to my jooties, I'd like to give ividence now that might help."

"We're greatly obliged to your reverence," said the coroner.

"There's bin a foul an' caluminous rumour," said Father John, raising his voice and looking over his spectacles at the jury, "that this young man was murdered. If there's ividence to that effect, well and good. That's for you to decide. But God forbid that such a vardict should go forth from this parish of Carrickmachree, on which the eyes of the whole world are now fixed. There's no place on the globe more spoke of, more written about, more riverenced than our howly parish, an' if a vardict of wilful murder was to go forth now from this table, it would be an awful blot on us all, an' on me as the praste of the flock. But do yir jooty, in the name of God, although the result be to blacken the fair name of Carrickmachree for iver in the sight of the world. I have here, Misther Coroner, documints that kem into my possession—papers, a kind of diary kept be that unfortunate young man—an' I've come on a passage that might help you in yir labours."

Looking genially round at the jury for approval, the coroner remarked :

"Father John, your presence here is an honour."

"Hear, hear!" said the jury.

"A great honour," continued the coroner, "for comin' here when your solemn duties call you elsewhere, and every minute of your day is occupied. Anything you may say we'll receive with the deepest respect."

There was another chorus of approval, and Father

John, having wiped his spectacles and put them on again, unrolled the papers, sought for a marked passage and cleared his throat.

"What I'm goin' to rade was written be the hand of the decaised," he explained, over his glasses to the jury, "an' you kin judge for yirselves if it has any bearin' on the case."

Turning to the diary, he slowly read:

"'To-day I saw her wanst agin.'" Pausing, he looked up at the coroner. "I must tell you," said he, "an' I'm sorry to tell you, that this young man had consaved a passion for Miss Maureen Malone." He proceeded to read: "'To-day I saw her wanst agin, an' I'm in despair. I cannot rid myself of her swate image. Betther for me to desthroy my worthless life an' be done wid it all, the misery, the monotony, the hopeless love—a momint's courage an' all is over!'"

Crushing the paper in his strong hand, Father John looked firmly at the jury.

"That's the kind of young man he was. He had no religion. He was a scoffer an' an atheist, an' thought no more of human life than any of you'd think of shootin' a rabbit. There's clare evidence here, Misther Coroner," he added, tapping the crumpled leaves with the back of his hand, "that this wretched young man contimplated takin' his own life."

The coroner, who had remained attentively facing Father John, now stood up.

"A moment your reverence," said he.

Father John sat gaping at him. The coroner beckoned him mysteriously to a corner. Father John then rose and the coroner whispered to him.

earnestly for several minutes, during which the jury held a low-toned conversation amongst themselves. The result of the consultation between the coroner and Father John was that the two men cordially shook hands, and as Father John, with a satisfied expression, went out, the coroner resumed his seat.

"Gentlemen," said the coroner, "I was just giving Father John a synopsis of the evidence as far as it goes. What's this?"

A note was handed to him by the constable, who stretched forward through the half-open door.

"Gentlemen," explained the coroner, when he had read the note, 'I've just received these few lines from Mister Delahunt, who says he'll be very pleased if you'll partake of refreshment at the end of your arduous labours."

The jurymen began to turn to each other and there arose a strong buzz of whispering. Sergeant Mulcahy alone remained grimly silent, gazing at the whitening lips of Paddy O'Connor.

"Misther Coroner," observed the foreman, rising, "the jury are of opinion that we've heard enough evidence."

The coroner nodded with an approving smile.

"An' we've come to a unanimous verdict," said the foreman; "that the decaised met his death be accident, be fallin' back on a slab of granite."

Bending towards the clerk, the coroner whispered something to him, then turned to the jury.

"Very good, gentlemen," said he; "your verdict does you credit, and I now dismiss you, thanking you for your kind attention."

No sooner were these words uttered, than the jury

tumbled out through both doors of the bar-parlour in search of Mr. Delahunt, whilst the coroner remained to argue with Sergeant Mulcahy, who gazed sternly on the ground and shook his head, like a man not to be convinced.

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